



CHIMERA

The war has long since ended, yet I still fight on. Broken in every way, but I stand strong. The lights are dim and the beatings grim. Every day a new hell and my survival appears slim. I lay underground, my screams unheard. Trapped, a victim to the disturbed. I fight day and I fight night. It's survival of the fittest much to my captor's delight. The needles come and go, injecting me with hate and pain. But I will not give up who I am; my contract will not be in vain. My body has changed, my body has warped. With wings to fly and a tongue that is forked. More beast than man. It will all go according to plan. They will all pay, their crimes will be met. By the man who they chained, caged up like a pet. They will lay trapped in the web of the spider. For I was once an experiment, now the survivor.

I do not know who will read this but I guess it does not matter as long as this story gets heard. What you are about to read will be disturbing, a tale of sadness, betrayal, regret, fear, and pain and trust me when I say that this entire story is completely and utterly factual. I was born as Vladimir Petros and throughout my existence, I have experienced a lot of loss, a lot of pain, and a lot of heartbreak. I had been lied to, used, then broken in every sense of the word. I have met the divine and the demonic, Gods and Devils, Angels and numerous monsters, but in my opinion, there is no greater evil than man. My name is Vladimir Petros, and this is the story of how I lost my humanity.

Now, if you are to understand my story, we need to travel four years into the past. The year is 2020 and humanity was finally starting its recovery after the near armageddon we faced that previous summer. As I am sure you know, monsters had mysteriously appeared all over the globe wreaking havoc and killing numerous innocents that summer. Despite only lasting one day,

the estimated loss of life from the attacks exceeded into the millions. Cities were leveled, lives were destroyed, and no one could understand why. That is, until a single man, a man with the powers to create objects and people from nothing came forward as the person responsible. He displayed his powers of creation and because everyone was afraid of him, he was not tried in court for the numerous deaths he caused. He was heavily monitored to ensure he couldn't harm anyone anymore. Some time passed and eventually, he was allowed to use his powers to aid in the reconstruction of society. He managed to rebuild the world; however, few could feel safe enough to fully trust him. After all, no one should have that kind of power. A few months after he aided the world, he just vanished and it seemed as if he was erased from reality entirely as there was no trace to where he had gone.

Nearly two years after his disappearance, during the Fall of 2022, a new catastrophe befell my home of Russia. This end of the world was quieter than the previous. Why it happened, no one knows. How it operated, there were no answers. All we know is that it started in an airport. One day sirens blared signifying a disaster and everyone tuned on to their televisions to see if the monsters had returned but that was not the case.

The second we turned on the news I witnessed with my mother, father, and dear sister Nina something which seemed like the start of a zombie horror movie. A man who looked like a junkie was curled up in a ball in the center of the airport shaking and mumbling words incomprehensible due to the distance between him and the reporter. I could only tell he was mumbling because I could see his mouth moving quickly.

“Why are they broadcasting an overdose and why is this siren worthy?” My father asked me confused.

I simply shrugged, despite being in the military, I could not understand either why this was a threat to our survival but that would soon be answered for us. Sweat began to pool out of the man like a hose and then the horror began. He stumbled to his feet and merely said “Help me.” before his skin lost all color and his muscles began to spasm like he was dancing some crazy dance and then from his arm I could see these black veins sprout from his forearm. These veins began to envelope his entire body and raised his head to the ceiling and screamed a scream of guttural fear. But this screams turned into something else, a scream that was not human. This man’s yells somehow became animalistic. It was as if a man’s screams, a lion’s roar, a hyena’s cackle, and a number of other animals were screaming a blood curdled scream in unison but they were all coming from this one man. He then stopped and started to clench his chest as if he were having a heart attack before falling to the ground with a loud THUD. I do not know what the newscaster said after that. In fact everyone disregarded the incident as an overdose of some unknown drug. I knew though, I knew that this was not just some drug. Nothing natural can create those screams. Dear god those screams, I can still hear them whenever I think of that moment.

Suspiciously, all flights coming and going were cancelled until “Further notice”. This was odd, I mean this man and whatever threat he possessed was gone right? Were the alarms set off accidentally, but then why are airports closed, and what about those screams. A week passed from then and everyone began to resume life as normal almost forgetting the airport incident entirely, however, our bliss would be turned into terror.

My country would soon be ravaged by a force we could not even fathom. It was a silent killer, where it struck, there was no trace, how it spread, there were no definitive answer. People died, many people died from this unseen entity. We were not dealing with a monster, we were

dealing with a viral outbreak. It became known as the black vein death. I know, not the best name but it was appropriate because when an “Infected” died, black veins would grow inside the body. The process was completely postmortem and discussing.

As a soldier, it was my job to prevent hysteria but it was difficult as no one trusted us. People thought we were responsible for this disease, a theory which I myself couldn't help but question. When I think of it everything lines up to this being a planned outbreak. The sirens go off, the man's screams, his weird death, and the airports immediately closing before the outbreak. I mean I for one believe in coincidences, but so many occurring sequentially is deeply suspicious.

Almost out of the blue, a mass sickness spread throughout the country, a plague of epic proportions which spread to the entire populous in a matter of hours. Only Russia was affected by this plague for some unknown reason, but what anyone will tell you is that this was no natural epidemic. Within the span of a week, the entire country had been blocked off from the world, all borders were closed and we were all just awaiting our inevitable deaths. Two thirds of the population died in the first month and then, things got weird. The disease just dissipated, no one was sick anymore, but that doesn't mean the deaths had stopped. The crummy media will tell you that all the deaths resulted from the plague, but that is a load of crap. Sure, many had died from the illness however, the deaths that occurred after the disease ended was a result of our fellow man. Two days after the sickness related deaths ended, those affected by the sickness were segregated into two categories, the Normals and the Marked. The Normals were the half of the remaining population who had no lasting symptoms of the plague; however, us marked were deemed as walking corpses just waiting to re-spread the terrible disease. We were called the Marked because soon after the illness passed, our bodies began to change, our skin became

extremely pale and these black veins began to protrude from our skin. These veins were seen as marks or omens and thus, the Normals took it upon themselves to "cleanse" us. Yeah, that type of cleanse. Our once peaceful community turned on us without a second thought and any person, facility, or community attempting to treat us would be met with the same fate as us. Many hospitals were set ablaze, newly regained livelihoods destroyed again, communities broken up, and piles of corpses began to cover the streets. Few survived the plague, and even fewer survived this genocide.

Why am I telling you this? Well it is because I too was a Marked. Me and my ten year old sister Nina. Sigh, I can still remember her brown curly hair, her baby blue eyes, and her wide loving smile. She was a beacon of hope in my otherwise worthless, hopeless life. Both of us had clear, large marks on our bodies. Mine was on the left side of my neck while her mark extended from her right forearm all the way to her index finger. Her mark looked like a black snake slithering up to that finger and it actually would have been a beautiful sight if it hadn't also been a death sentence.

Now, before everything turned to shit, I was a military sniper, and a damn good one at that so you better believe I was not going to go down without a fight and I would use all my training to ensure that no harm would come to Nina. She was all I had and vice versa. Days came and went of us running. We kept running until we were cramping like crazy and red as a tomato. Each second we weren't running, we scoured through destroyed, uninhabited communities for food. We would stockpile any necessary resources available and continue on our journey. Ever been on the run, ever had everyone you once known either hunt you down or die a painful death? I don't think so. Every moment, Nina and I were living in fear, every sound was a nearby gunshot waiting for us, every shadow was the grim reaper eagerly awaiting for our

souls, and every echo of our footsteps was a hunter tailing us. I had to be on guard 24/7. Not once in the five days on the run did I drift off to sleep, I was too paranoid of what may happen if I let my guard down. Eventually, on the sixth day, we made it to a beach and for the first time in seemingly forever, light was shining down on us. There was a pontoon boat on the nearby docks and the two of us ran to it. We jumped aboard and I untethered us from the dock. I didn't care if there were any keys or if the boat had any gas. We could drift out into the ocean for all I cared so long as Nina would be safe from the psychopaths hunting us down like rabid dogs.

This boat shouldn't have even been here as our borders were still closed but I guess God was on our side for once. And that wasn't the only blessing, the keys were in the boat, it had a nearly full tank, and it had a GPS mounted above the speedometer. This boat also had a small interior sheltered from the outside which held the steering wheel and GPS. I had never driven a boat before but that didn't matter now. I simply turned the boat to full speed and directed the wheel to face east. We were going to America for freedom. After an hour of driving the boat and we couldn't see land anymore, I turned the boat off and the two of us sat down outside of the small sheltered area holding the steering wheel, and ate a small portion of our rations. And for the first time in nearly a week, I managed to drift off to sleep.

I was abruptly awakened at an unknown time after I fell asleep to rough waves hitting the side of the boat. When we left Russia, it had been dawn, but now, the sun was making its descent. I feel a stinging on my neck and realize that I got a bad sunburn. To make matters worse, the rocking of the boat was not agreeing with the food I had eaten prior to me falling asleep so I ran over to the side of the boat and hurled. Once that was over with, I turned to see Nina pretending to steer the still drifting boat by turning the wheel. Within a minute or two, I regained my sea legs and stood up. I head over to her and placed my hand on her shoulder.

Eventually, she exited the seat and I continued driving the boat eastwards. Unfortunately, during my slumber, we drifted very far off course so I had to check the Satellite GPS to figure out which direction to drive in. Within an hour, we were back on track. Now, just because I hadn't driven a boat before doesn't mean I couldn't tell the distance we need to cover and the time that will take. I still remember looking at the monitor and seeing that we were nearly three thousand nautical miles away from the coast of California. Since two nautical miles is equivalent to an approximate ten hour distance, we had about seven days to go provided I limit how long I spent sleeping and eating.

Four days later, We hit stormy weather and the engine just stopped working. Nina and I simply waited out the storm in the small room and when it passed, I tried turning the engine back on but nothing happened. I guess we used up all our gas. Luckily, we were two days ahead of schedule and the monitor was still working. Unfortunately, we only had a days worth of rations left so because we didn't know how much longer it would take, we had to ration our rations to ensure it would last.

One day later and we were making great time as the waves were pointing us right in the direction we needed. It was probably early afternoon when we felt the first raindrops. It wasn't falling that hard but still frequent enough that I had the idea of using rainwater to fill our water bottles. It worked but after the fifth water bottle was filled, that was when things turned south. We unfortunately get caught in the eye of a massive storm. Funnel clouds were overhead, roaring winds which sounded like the wails of tormented souls plagued the air, lightning flashed across the sky every few seconds with ear shattering thunder never far behind. Then there was the rain, it poured down with such force and rapid succession that you couldn't see anything. Nina was cowering in the corner of the room during most of the storm as she had a massive fear

of the loud booming roars of thunder so I comforted her. I grabbed my duffle bag and took out a sketchbook and some markers. I had snatched them a few days prior while in search for food. I gave it to her and luckily her drawing distracted her enough from the roars outside that she was finally able to relax. The storm wouldn't let up for hours and soon I couldn't tell if it was nighttime or if the storm just made it appear so.

Morning eventually came and with it, the storm left. I checked the monitors and the signal was scrambled. I was no very pissed and seeing that Nina was sleeping, I exited the room, closed the door, lifted my head to the heavens and screamed "Fuck!!!!!" for what had to be ten seconds before I slipped onto the deck as the floor was still soaking wet and slippery from the storm. I then gradually got up and made my way back inside. I sat back down in the chair at the controls hoping that the GPS resumes functioning. Thirty minutes pass and nothing, just static. I place my head in my hands and silently weep as my hope began to dwindle. We have been out at sea for almost a week and have very little to show for it, we are out of food, out of fuel, and are utterly lost. The only thing I could do now is count the time passing as the insanity kicks in. Hours pass and eventually Nina wakes up, her long hair covering her face as she stretches and yawns. I look at her and then I see her eyes go wide and her smile extend from ear to ear. She definitely isn't smiling because she sees me, no, she is staring at something. I turn slowly and can see a beach far in the distance and for the first time in weeks, I too feel a genuine smile stretch across my face. I hugged Nina so hard at that moment.

"We made it." I told her as I kissed her forehead. Then I ran outside the room and grabbed the oars that were in the trunk of the boat. I start rowing towards the land and before long, Nina joins me. within no more than forty minutes, we reached land. It was still early and I didn't see anyone on the beach but that didn't matter, we were finally safe.

The two of us ran across the sand and threw it in the air as if it were gold coins. Oh how I wish I could feel that happy once more. Not long after spending time on the beach, we walked around the area in search for someplace to stay or at least eat as the two of us were tired and very hungry. There was just one problem with that, we had no U.S currency. Sure I gathered plenty of rubles while we were on the run but there is no way that this money is good here I thought. So once people began leaving their homes to start the day, I slowly approached them asking if they knew where I could find a currency exchange center. The first few people I asked simply ignored my which greatly pissed me off. But then I approached a complete asshole. He was overweight, balding, and in a tank top two sizes too small. As soon as I began asking him in my thick Russian accent, the man simply scoffed and told me right to my face "Go back to where you came from, no one wants you here." I saw red at that moment, I was pure muscle and 6'1 compared to this prick's 5'6 and chubby body. I lifted him up by the shoulder straps of his tank top and gave him the most evil stare I could muster. "How dare you! Do you have any idea the lengths my sister and I had to take to get here, how many tears shed. Huh do you!" I shout at him managing to place the fear of God in him. I would have done more but Nina stopped me by yelling my name. This brought me back to my senses and I let the man go to which he bolted so fast in the opposite direction. I then feel ashamed because I made Nina see me like that and I apologized to her. She simply hugs me and accepts my apology before saying she will ask the next person.

Soon, she approached a mother who was pulling a stroller with a baby boy inside. She asked the mom, "Excuse me miss, I am sorry to bother you but do you by any chance know where we can exchange currency." Her tone was warm, calm, and hopeful.

"Oh, um, just give me a second." The woman said with a slight french accent before taking out her phone and typing something in it. "Okay, the only one around here is in the airport. It's about a thirty minute drive from here." She continued hopeful that she was being helpful.

It was at that moment where I approached her and I could see her tense up. I know I look intimidating to many, but in all honesty, I am not a bad person. I simply say a genuine thank you to her and she calms down.

"Glad to help." She said smiling.

With that, Nina and I began walking in the direction of the airport according to that woman. It took us maybe two hours or more to get there as we couldn't pay a taxi but it didn't take long after arriving at the airport for us to transfer our money into U.S dollars. We didn't have enough money to sustain ourselves indefinitely, but it was enough for at least a cheap apartment and food.

A New Beginning

Months came and went since the two of us entered the United States and I have been searching everywhere for a job so that I could afford a better living situation for Nina. Each day, I lost more and more hope that I will find a job, but I never allowed Nina to see that. In her mind, this was only a small setback and I would find a job soon. The last thing I want is for her to live on the streets, I could easily survive, but Nina, my sweet, innocent, young and gentle sister wouldn't last a day. She deserves luxury, not a filthy apartment with a single light on a fan and no furniture other than a fold up chair and a mattress. I kept telling her that it won't be much longer, soon we will have a better living situation. Each time I said this, I would struggle to hold

back the tears. Our money was beginning to dwindle and if I didn't do something quick, we will have no option other than homelessness.

I eventually had to use our homeland as motivation to never quit my search for work.

"Pull yourself together Vlad! You escaped execution and made it to the land of opportunity, if you could do that, you can find a job! Do it for Nina! Make it so she never has to feel pain or fear again!" I would tell myself.

Eventually, I found work doing odd jobs, they were crap and offered crap however, it was enough to pay rent. This apartment sucked but it was the only stability we had. But, like everything else in our lives, that stability would be taken from us.

One day, I was getting ready to work another odd job and was in the middle of pouring Nina some cereal when it happened. Even today, two years later, that event is fresh in my mind. First I heard heavy boots running up the stairs, then I heard whispering right outside the door. Even then I knew what was going to happen next.

"Run!" I yell at Nina just as the door got kicked in. She screams in terror and tries to flee but one of the men makes a b-line to her.

"Don't you dare touch her!" I yell at the man running after her as my sight turned to red. I was trained to deal with situations like this and my number one goal was to protect Nina. I throw the man aside and try escaping myself when I get tackled by two men. It didn't take long for them to restrain me. They were struggling to keep me down, but at that moment, I was immobile. I was trying to escape once more when I see a female enter the room with what looked like a gun. She pointed it towards my chest and I yell "DO IT! KILL ME! KILL ME!!!" She then pulled the trigger and I felt a deep pain coming from my chest. It was like I was stabbed with two

needles, then the jolt of an intense electrical wave rushed through my body. It was a taser, not a gun. I was soon on the ground and handcuffed. While on the ground, I began to slowly fade in and out of consciousness but right before I blacked out, I saw a man holding Nina in what looked like a bear hug. She was squirming and attempting to punch and kick the man while yelling "Let me go!" Seeing this, I manage to say "Nina." in a hoarse voice before completely losing consciousness.

I did not know who these people were at the time but eventually, I learned that they were with immigrations. When I regained consciousness, I was shackled and in a dark holding cell alongside Nina. I looked at her and let me tell you, seeing the fear and sadness in her eyes, it ripped my heart in two immediately. All I could do was hug her and hold her close and say "I'm so sorry Nina, I failed." Tears began to flow down my face and the two of us remained in our embrace for hours quietly sobbing the entire time.

Our moment was then cut short when I hear a man clear his throat in a way to get our attention. I look passed the bars and saw a man who definitely needed to lay off the donuts stand. His uniform was stained with grease and still had crumbs covering it. He then told us that we were going to be brought back to Russia for illegally entering the country and will be charged when we arrive there within the end of the week.

"No! Please, do not send us back to Russia!" I pleaded while also revealing my mark to him, "If you send us back there, both my sister and I will be killed for having these marks, please, I'm begging you. Have mercy!" I try to appeal to this man's sense of decency but that seemed to be non existent because he just smirks and turns to leave.

"Please! Just take me back and let Nina stay! I cannot live with the thought of what she will have to endure when we return!" I am now a blubbering mess and I see the guy turn around and he simply says "Not my problem."

That night, no sleep would be had as I was paralyzed by fear. There was no hiding it now, Nina could see the terror in my face which made her even more scared. I was her safety, her protector, and I failed her.

The next morning, a female officer woke me up saying I had a visitor. I wanted to be hopeful that it was a lawyer who would set us free but in all honesty, my hope was nearing non-existence.

She then walks me to what looks like an interview room with a single metal table and two chairs on opposite sides of each other. As I lift my head upwards, I can see a man standing with his back to me, he was in a nice, navy blue suit and wore incredibly clean white gloves, and shoes so black and shiny that I bet I could see my reflection in them if I tried. He then spoke in a gruff voice "That'll be all officer."

The police woman left the room but not before saying to me "Tread carefully, this may be your only chance so don't screw yourself." She said it with such authority that if I weren't so broken, I may have actually felt intimidated. As soon as she left, I sat down and the man turned to face me. He appeared to be of Native American descent with short greasy hair and jet black sunglasses.

"What a tool", I thought as I never understood people who wore sunglasses indoors. He then slowly approached me and I could see one of his eyes briefly through the blackness of his sunglasses. I immediately tensed up after seeing it as it didn't look like a human eye, if anything it looked more serpentine than anything. All together, this man made me

uncomfortable. Eventually, he was right behind me and I was afraid he'd try to execute me. I see his hands lower and I close my eyes and wait. But instead of a snap, I hear a click and when I opened my eyes, the handcuffs were off. I stand up and face this guy.

"Why did you do that?" I asked him as I began rubbing my wrists.

"You seemed uncomfortable." He said matter of factly.

"Okay, but what's to prevent me from trying to escape now?" I asked.

"You're more than welcome to try. But I wouldn't recommend it." He chuckled.

This put me at ease and I relaxed a bit. I then saw him sit down in the chair in front of me before reaching into his suit and pulling out a manilla envelope.

"You are quite the man Vladimir Petros. Strong, persistent, dedicated, very handy with a rifle, and all in all a loyal soldier." He says seemingly complimenting me.

I tighten my gaze on him, "Okay so you know who I am. But what do you want with me?" I asked him bluntly.

"Straight to the point are we? Alright, I can respect that. You see Vlad, a soldier of your caliber is too great to be nonsensically executed because of a simple marking. That is why I'm here." He said all high and mightily.

I interrupted him by asking "Who are you?"

"Who I am is of little importance here, all you need to know is that I am the one thing standing between your execution and freedom. I, or more like the people I work for, have a proposition for you Mr. Petros which I strongly suggest you listen to. We will grant both you and your sister freedom." My ears perk up at this. He has my attention now and he knows that. He then continued, "All we ask in return is for you to participate in an... experiment you could say. Agreeing to participate will guarantee your freedom, but you cannot back out once the

experiment has begun, it will be dangerous and you will get hurt, but the total reward is definitely worth it."

"Sounds too good to be true, how do I know this isn't some scam. Also, how do I know I can trust you." I asked.

"Oh believe me, you don't need to trust me, but my offer is 100% real. Let me ask you, how is it that a fully functioning boat would be allowed in plain sight while the country its in has its borders closed. Furthermore, why would that boat be specifically out in the open with the keys available and have a GPS to lead a runaway to freedom." He spoke with such cunning when he said this that my eyes grew so wide.

"It was you." I asked him to which he only smiled and said "Maybe it was maybe it wasn't."

He then took out a contract and a pen and placed it in front of me. I made sure to read it thoroughly and it essentially said the same thing he was offering. It didn't go into specifics but what caught my eye is the emblem of the United States military. I have seen many government documents before in Russia, signed many as well so I could definitely spot a fake government contract and this was definitely real.

"All we need is your consent and I will escort you away from this facility right away."

I pushed the paper aside and stand up before saying "I will sign under one condition. Honor me that and I will participate in anything you ask."

He simply shrugged and asked "Which is?"

"Nina. No harm will come to her if I agree. She will receive special care, be treated with nothing but love and kindness during my absence. Promise me that and I am yours.

You must swear on your life that you will keep her safe. If you go back on this promise, not even an army will keep you safe. With God as my witness, I will hunt you down and make you will regret the day you were born. Understand.” I told him coldly.

“Is that all.” He asked as if completely unfazed by the severity of my words.

“Yes.” I answered.

He smiled revealing shiny white teeth and extended his arm out to me before telling me “With God as my witness, no harm will come to Nina. So long as you comply with what you are told, which is nearly impossible to fail at, you will have nothing to worry about. You have my word that she will be safe and receive the best care possible.” He said this with such genuineness in his voice that I shook his hand and signed his contract then and there.

“Excellent.” He said after I wrote down my signature and soon, he and I left that room and began heading towards the cell containing Nina.

Since I there was no going back on his promise, I was finally able to tell Nina, with zero doubt in my mind, that everything is going to be okay now. I told her that our prayers have finally been answered. She studied my face in search for any hindrance of doubt but there wasn't any. She then looked happy and excited once more which reformed my broken heart. We soon left the police station and outside waiting for us was a jet-black limousine with blacked out windows and a chauffeur with an earpiece.

The three of us entered the limo and both Nina and I were finally happy. Only Nina and I sat in the back while the suited man sat upfront with the driver.

The two of us sat in that limousine for what seemed like hours but our anticipation never dwindled because it appeared our hellish nightmare was over; however, it was

just beginning and I would soon realize that signing up for this experiment would result in a fate worse than anything we'd receive had we have been deported back to Russia.

Dreams of a Fool

Eventually, the limo stopped and the suited man opened the door for us. Due to being inside a dark limo for no less than an hour, the light from the outside was blinding. I had to cover my eyes for a second but once I could see once more, I was in awe. Standing before us was a massive mansion with a huge water fountain in the center of the driveway, a large garden to each of the mansions sides, and kids of all different ages out and about. Some looked as young as six while others appeared to be in their late teens. Each of them were either playing with toys or each other, reading, writing, drawing, or just resting on the grass.

“Good.” I thought, “He’s keeping his end of the promise.”

I then looked at Nina and her mouth was agape but also in a smile, her eyes were wide, and she was just exuding happiness.

Then the suited man walked up behind me and whispered in my ear. “I kept my end of the deal so there is absolutely no reason for you to not participate and comply with everything we ask of you.” He whispered this in such a cold and emotionless tone which honestly sent shivers down my spine. But, there was something else in his tone, it seemed like a hint of mockery.

I turn quickly to this man and thank him immensely and promise him that I will do whatever is asked of me.

He replies with a big, toothy grin and I swear, his teeth were jagged. I just shook it off and turned back to my sister who was frozen to the spot in excitement. I then dropped to one knee and hugged her tightly. She then tried to grab my arm and pull me to the entrance.

“I am sorry Nina. But this is your stop, not mine. For our freedom, I promised this man that I would help him with a very special task. I am so sorry that a cannot stay but I promise that I will visit every chance I can.” I told her this managing to hold off the tears so that she didn’t have to see her strong brother break down crying again.

Surprisingly, Nina took it very well. I assumed that she simply thought it wouldn’t take me too long to finish helping this man. Either that or she was still reeling from the excitement and didn’t fully understand what I was saying. But still, she embraced me tightly and before long, someone opened the front entrance and escorted Nina inside. She entered that mansion with a bounce in each of her steps and I re-entered the limo where I proceeded to cry a literal ocean of tears.

The suited man then patted me on the back and I soon stopped crying. I then looked up and saw he was grinning maliciously which again unnerved me. “Maybe it’s just one of his quirks.” I told myself.

“Pretty bold of you to promise her that you will visit her.” He said almost laughing.

“What do you mea-“ I tried to ask but he simply cut me off.

“The deal was that she would receive the best of care. You cannot just make promises you cannot keep.” He explained still with that huge grin before his face went blank of all emotions and then continued, “Look, your a nice guy who clearly cares a lot about your sister,

but unfortunately, visiting her is not an option.” He said this last part with sadness in his voice which confused me if anything else as he was just grinning like crazy.

“But. I will talk with the higher ups and ask them to at least give you opportunities to video conference with her.” He said this with such confidence that it almost seemed like he was rehearsing a line he had said many times before.

“Thank you.” I told him.

“It’s the least I could do. You have no idea how much shit I’d be in if I hadn’t recruited you. The higher ups would have my head on a spit.” This line also seemed to perfectly spoken. This was definitely something he has said before, he was talking almost like he was reciting the script to a play. But, I didn’t care whatsoever, Nina was safe and that’s all that mattered to me.

After driving for maybe twenty more minutes, the car made a sharp turn and the road turned bumpy. I then saw the suited man pound on the glass separating the passenger seats from the driver and I can hear a muffled “Sorry.” It was clear that we were no longer on the road due to how the car was driving now.

Soon the suited man pulled out a black duffle bag from beneath his seat and threw it at me. I luckily caught it by its strap and just looked back at the man. He gestured me to look inside before he began to cross his arms, face his head to the ceiling and make his devilish grin returned.

I simply rolled my eyes and pulled out a black tank top before once again staring back at the man.

“Well? Put it on.” He said.

I then took off my shirt and placed this new one on. I got it over my head when I realized that it was very small.

The man must have noticed my struggle with putting the shirt on and spoke up, “Don’t worry about ripping it, it is made of an extremely durable fabric.” After he said this, I forced the shirt down and, just as he said, it didn’t rip. I then placed my arms through the sides and tucked the shirt downwards. I was expecting for the tight neck hole to be chocking me, but instead, it seemed to loosen its tightness. The tank top was the definition of skin tight as every muscle in my torso was fully exposed, but I was surprisingly comfortable. The shirt was tight but not constricting and it was actually very comfortable and breathable. I looked down and noticed a Russian flag plastered on my chest.

“You look good Vlad.” The man said.

“Uh.. Thanks.” I said a bit confused as to why he gave me the shirt.

“Can’t have you participate without a proper uniform.” He said.

Not long after I placed that shirt on, the car came to a complete stop.

“Ah, we’re here.” The man stated before exiting the car. I followed suit and saw that we were in the middle of nowhere. We were parked besides a massive cliff, but other than that, there was nothing but desert for miles.

“What the hell! There is nothing here! Is this just a joke to you?” I yelled at the man to which he lightly chuckled.

“Oh, you think we are nowhere? Yee of little faith. We are standing on your future. If you doubt this, just tap that cliff.” He said obviously trying to contain his laughter at my apparent foolishness.

I do so and knocked of the cliff as if it were a door and instead of the normal thunk of a knuckle making contact with rock, instead I hear an echoed clang. This cliff was metal. I backed off slowly, eyes wide, and stunned that this was no normal structure.

I turned back to face the man and along with his creepy smile, I noticed that he was holding a blindfold. “Trust me, it’s for the best that you don’t see what’s directly through this entrance. It’s...unsettling.” He said this slightly unnerved himself so I tightened the blindfold over my eyes and soon I heard what sounded like an elevator lowering before a feeling of the ground shifting. I didn’t need my eyes to know that we were not standing on solid ground but a platform that was lowering. Within a minute or so of us descending, I hear the platform clank followed by a sudden stoppage of motion which threw me off balance. I then feel the man’s gloved hand grab my own and he directed me to where I needed to go. We are just walking straight when we suddenly come to an abrupt halt. I was wondering why we stopped but then I heard it. It was muffled but as I focused on it, I realized that it was muffled screams. Those screams, they weren’t human, I didn’t know what was making those screams of intense agony but to say it was unsettling would be an extreme understatement.

“What the hell is that?” I asked nervously.

“J..just don’t ask.” He said with a shaky voice and I could feel his arm trembling, he was afraid. Within seconds after the noises died down, we resumed walking and the next thing I knew, the man removed my blindfold. In front of me was a small, dark bedroom with only a bed and single light occupying the space. It was the kind of light that you had to pull a string to turn on. I then noticed a small door on the side of my room and I questioned him what was inside.

“A bathroom.” He responded.

I then looked around and saw that I was in a completely white hallway. There were no lights visible anywhere other than in my room but somehow, the hallway was completely illuminated, almost as if the white paint was acting as a light. I also noticed numerous doors aligning with the door to my apparent room on both sides of the hallway.

“Someone will be coming by in a few hours to start your training, so it is probably a good idea to get some rest before hand.” The man said as he guided me into the room.

“And do not forget, Nina’s well being solely rests on your compliance. I seriously doubt that there is any way you can fail at that but just be aware okay.” He than remarked in a tone void of all emotion or feeling.

With that, he shut the door plunging me in pitch darkness and I was still shivering at his words. Eventually, the shivering stopped and I threw my duffle bag into the corner and went under the covers.

At first I had trouble falling asleep as I did not know what exactly I was participating in as well as the fact that if I screw up, Nina will also be in trouble. I was getting stressed out but I eventually was able to reassure myself by reminding myself that these people made a promise to me that Nina will be safe and that’s all that matters.

So I must have been sleeping for at least an hour before a blinding light wakes me up followed by creaking and heavy footsteps heading right for my bed. I open my eyes and am honestly terrified for a quick moment when I lock eyes with a tall, slender, slightly disheveled man standing right in front of me. He is wearing glasses which partially covered his dark green eyes as well as the heavy bags beneath them. He has a beard which extends about two inches beneath his chin. His skin is a light ebony and he is wearing a bright white lab coat with a white button down shirt beneath that. His tie has a pattern that started with an extremely whitish pink

color which got darker eventually becoming red, then crimson, and ending with a brownish color. He is wearing normal but slightly baggy jeans and other than a few other minor things, that is basically everything about the guy in front of me.

After studying his appearance, I lock eyes with him and he starts to grin.

Somehow it stretched wider than the man from before. I am getting creeped out and before I can say anything, this guy pulls out a tablet out of his big lab coat pockets. He simply shook it in front of me like someone showing a dog a treat. This guy is seriously creeping me out and the silence in the room is twice as unnerving. I simply grab the tablet and right after it leaves the man's hands, he speaks up in a gruff, low pitched voice.

"You cannot be a proper soldier without a weapon. We have studied you for quite a while now Mr. Petros and have compiled a list of the most optimal weapons to support your fighting styles. All you need to do is determine which weapon on this list you feel the biggest connection to." He says this as if explaining the rules of an assessment to a kid in grade school.

"Soldier huh." I muffle as this is the first indicator as to what I will be doing here.

I then scrolled across a large assortment of different weapons. Each of these weapons had one thing in common which confused me, each weapon was attached to a part of my body. Essentially, each weapon I scrolled past would be an image of me with a piece of weaponry attached to my person. Like sharp metal thorns on my fingers, shovels extending from my knuckles, blade-like spikes on my shoulders, and even these metallic fins all over my body combined with what looked like gills on my neck. Despite being confused, I continued to look through each image but I didn't feel any connection to them. That is, until I see these dual blades which begin at my forearm and extend to past my knuckles. Once they were past my fingers, the blade curved downwards which would allow me to use my hands and fingers without the blades

getting in the way. I return the tablet to the man in front of me and his grin somehow grows even wider.

“Ah, the steel arm blades, great choice!” He begins a giddy, before continuing, “Nigh indestructible, lightweight, and incredibly sharp and lethal. Perfect for those who attack swiftly. Looks like you will be a stealth. Good, we need more of them.” He says this with such anticipation on his face, like a kid about to finally do what he wants after being told “no” so many times. I am extremely confused with what he is saying and as he is placing the tablet back into his pocket, I try to ask him what is going on. However, the second I take a breathe in preparation to speak, he says “Now the fun can begin.” He says this so happily that the red flags are blaring in my mind but before I can react, he pulls out a button of some sorts and when he presses it, two shackles deploy from the bed and wrap themselves around my arms.

“What the fuck is going on!?” I yell at this guy as I try to break free from these restraints but it is no use. He then takes out a large syringe from his pocket.

“Wait! What are you going to do with that!” I scream.

“Starting the experiment.” He says as he starts to laugh. He then approaches me with that big needle and I scream “NO!” As I continue to flail around in an attempt to either escape my shackles or knock this guy out, but, he manages to subdue me with a sleeve choke. He is cutting off my circulation and I cannot breathe. He then slowly injects me in the neck with whatever was in that syringe and soon he lets go of my neck.

I am clenching my neck right when he lets go as my airflow returns to normal. I am about to kick this guy when my vision starts to blur and my thoughts become erratic. My body gets heavier and I cannot move.

“What did you do to me?” I manage to slur out before completely blacking out.

When I finally awake from my drug induced slumber, I more terrified than I've ever been. I try to move but I cannot and that is when panic begins to set in. I can at least move my head and oh God do I wish I didn't look down. I was in what looked like an old metal dentist chair, with my arms, legs, and body locked to it. I then hear heavy footsteps approaching me and I scream out "HELP!!!!!" But instead of a savior, I see the man from before, but instead of a lab coat, he is wearing a smock, pyro goggles, huge mechanics gloves, and welding a fucking blowtorch. I then see that he is holding something else, something shiny. Oh God, its the blades I selected. "He isn't actually going to...no he can't this is all just some joke...yeah, a joke that's it." I think to myself hysterically.

He then takes one of those blades and gazes at it as if it were a piece of fine art before saying "Beautiful."

Yes, he actually said beautiful. Then, he took the blowtorch and began burning the bottom of the first blade until I could see part of it was melting. I am now freaking out even more and am damn near about to have a heart attack when he turns his head to face me, grin as wide as ever.

"No, no no no no no no no no no!!!!!! GET THE FUCK AWAY FROM ME!!!!!!!" I scream out but he only responds by saying "Hold still!" before placing that piece of molten steel on the back of my arm.

I shriek in pain as the boiling metal begins to stick to my flesh. Then this fucker takes the blowtorch once more and starts to singe the edges of the blade onto my arm thus fusing the metal to my flesh. The second the flame of his blowtorch made contact with my skin, I couldn't help but scream even louder to which this guy says "Oh shut up already!" Eventually, the pain was just too much and I blacked out.

When I regained consciousness after who knows how long, I realized that I was once again in the bedroom, but surprise surprise, I couldn't move. I looked down and saw that I was placed in a straight jacket and was sitting on top of my bed. Not only that but there were two enormous blades on my arms. And that was when I remembered what had just happened to me. I was hoping that it was just a nightmare, but no, I had actually been subjected to that savage and sadistic form of torture. I then started to study my arms as they were the only bit of skin visible to me. The rest of my body was concealed by the straight jacket and the only reason the flesh on my forearms was visible was because the blades attached to my arms cut a bit of the jacket's fabric in order for my arms to go through the sleeves. The metal was completely fused to my arms and it was clear to me that these things were never coming off. I guess the shock that these things were actually attached to me combined with my ever growing rage were the only reasons why I didn't feel any pain at that moment.

Not long after I regained consciousness, I heard a voice echo throughout the room, it was a voice I had never heard before and it seemed very excited. "Vladimir Petros, welcome to Project Chimera!" Is what I heard and even today it sticks to me. An auditory haunting of my past that continues to leave shivers up my spine as it was a harbinger of what horrors were to come.

"What the fuck did I get myself into?" I asked myself. Oh if only I knew what was to come.

Within seconds of that announcement, I see my door open once more. I was half expecting/hoping for the bastard who tortured me to re-enter the room so I could subject him to my own form of torture but that wasn't the case. Instead of that asshole, I saw a woman enter the room. I was a little less wary and apprehensive when I realized it was not the man from before

but that didn't mean I was going to let my guard down as I had no idea of what her motives were. Then I saw her face, if I could describe her face in one word I could either choose defeated or broken. I could tell she was once a smiler but now her mouth forever shows a look of misery. Her eyes were visibly scarred from countless hours of crying and are now sunken and almost void of all emotion. In addition to that, she appeared to be sleep deprived or at least an insomniac as she had clear bags under her eyes. Her clothes were wrinkled and stretched but I could tell she didn't care. Her hair was long, reaching the middle of her back and was as dark as a shadow. Her hair was also messy and covering her eyes. As the distance between us decreased, I noticed her thin rimmed glasses which honestly looked out of place. Those glasses commanded confidence which was something this woman clearly hasn't felt in a long time. I seriously felt bad for this woman rather than fear for what she is here for. She was holding a briefcase and slowly looked at the case then to me before slowly blinking. She obviously has seen the depths of hell. Eventually, I heard her speak and I was surprised as if her appearance was any indicator, she seemed too dead to talk.

“I'm sorry.” She spoke in a tired voice and a tone that indicated she didn't want to do this.

I actually couldn't feel any fear at that moment, instead I could only feel sad for this poor woman. In an attempt to make this easier for her, I just nodded and said “Do what you need to do.”

At that, I could see her attempt to morph her mouth to form a smile but her face was permanently stuck looking miserable and broken. She then laid the briefcase on the ground, dropped to one knee, and unlocked the case. I then saw her pull something out, and that's when the fear re-entered my body. What this woman was holding looked like a revolving grenade

launcher with a needle attached to the nozzle. She then looked at me slowly, still with that dead look in her eyes and once again spoke up, “Vladimir Petros right?”

I simply nod as I am too surprised by what she pulled out to respond.

“Okay just give me a second.” She continued as she pulled out a vile from the briefcase. I looked at that vile and the liquid inside it honestly looked like blood. She then placed the vile though the back of the grenade launcher and then placed on a pair of heavy gloves before pulling the trigger. Within an instant, the chambers started to move and eventually, they increased in speed. The chambers were spinning at such a rapid pace that I thought the machine was going to break or at least start smoking but that wasn’t the case. Eventually, I heard the distinct sounds of static shocks emanating from this launcher. I even thought I saw a tiny bolt of electricity traveling between barrels as the spinning began to slow down. She then got closer to me and said once again “I’m really sorry.” But even though I knew she meant it, there was no emotion to her words.

She then used one hand to hold onto my left shoulder while the other brought the grenade launcher closer to that shoulder. It got closer and closer to my shoulder and the second that needle touched the fabric above my shoulder, an intense shockwave bled through the straight jacket and permeated my shoulder. It was nothing compared to having metal fused with skin so I didn’t scream in pain but still, it was intense. Eventually, the needle was slowly pressed into my shoulder and once it was fully inside my flesh, I felt a thick liquid pour out from that needle into my bloodstream. It almost felt like a vaccine entering your body but much thicker. I groaned in discomfort as I’ve always hated the feeling of being injected. Needles didn’t necessarily scare me, it was the idea of something entering my system which always unnerved me. I then looked at this woman and she was wide eyed and trembling. Not only that but she was also

hyperventilating. At first I have no clue why she looked like she just saw a ghost but then I realized what she was staring at. Her gaze was directed at my neck, at my mark. At the time, I didn't know why the black veins on my neck terrified her so much but she then quickly packed up the launcher and rushed out of the room without a word. That whole experience was incredibly weird and I had so many questions, very few even related to what was injected into me. Unfortunately, I would later come to realize that that first injection sealed my fate.

Within maybe ten minutes of getting that injection, my body started reacting: I broke out in cold sweats, I couldn't stop trembling, my eyesight became blurry, my head started spinning like crazy, and soon I was overcome with intense nausea. I tried to move, tried to yell for help but I was fading quickly. Eventually, I spilled out my guts and I am almost positive that I saw blood in the bile I puked out. Then, I fell to the ground and heard the door slam open before everything once again turned black.

When I next opened my eyes, I appeared to be in a normal doctors office. It's weird, the fact that the office was just like any other doctors office actually unsettled me more than anything else. I could barely move but surprisingly, this time I wasn't restrained by anything. I guess my body was just too weak to move this time. Then I saw the oxygen mask around my mouth. My head was still spinning and I could hardly focus on anything when I heard glass shattering.

"What the actual fuck!? You actually thought that he was ready for that!? You lucky you brought him to me when you did because its a miracle he didn't die on the spot!" I heard a man shout from outside the room in a pissed off voice.

“Oh come on Kelly, you said it yourself that the reaction for him would be different because of the... Well you know. So we thought he could handle the process quicker.”

Another man said as if trying to justify something.

Those two were clearly talking about me but I had very little idea what they meant by me being different and handling a process. I was just so out of it at that moment and just felt so weak.

“You should have consulted me. Ugh, sometimes I really hate what you guys do.” I hear the first guy say after a long pause.

“Come on Kelly, don’t act so high and mighty. You’re just as responsible as the rest of us.” The other guy noted.

“Just... Just let me do my job okay. And from now on, please keep me in the loop.” The first guy said seemingly concerned about something or someone.

“Okay, just try to get him back to full health, he is an invaluable asset to us.” The other guy responded before walking away from the door.

I then heard the door to the room open and see a man enter the room. From what I could tell, he was tall, caucasian, had brown hair that was both messy and smooth, and was wearing a sweater vest under his lab coat, black jeans, and what appeared to be a grey germ mask.

“Oh you’re awake.” He said surprised but there was a slight muffle in his words. I soon stared at his face and realized that from his mouth to beneath his neck, there was a metal mask like structure which was obviously fused to his skin like my blades.

“Ugh, I don’t know how much if any of that you heard but don’t worry. Your safe now.” The man said with such certainty to his words. I don’t know whether it was the way he spoke or something else but I just knew that he was someone I could trust.

“Thank you.” I managed to say through the intense pain I was feeling before continuing “What happened to me?”

“You’re body wasn’t given enough time to adapt to the enhanced agents introduced into your system. The assholes running this show thought it would be a good idea to immediately introduce your body to something it wasn’t ready for as it was still focusing on healing up the damage caused from gaining your weapons. That intense strain on your body proved to be too much and it nearly induced organ failure. Don’t worry, your stable know and you won’t be introduced to anymore strain on your body so you can fully heal and adjust to what was injected. Sorry for being so blunt but you need to know what’s going on if you want to see tomorrow in a place like this.” He said.

Even though his words were a little confusing, I basically got the gist of what he was saying.

“This may sound like a weird question but why am I not restrained.” I mustered out. I still don’t understand why I asked that but maybe my curiosity overpowered any other thought.

He then stared up to the ceiling and clenched his fists before saying “I seriously hate his methods. Sigh, don’t worry, you don’t need to be afraid, well at least for now. Look, the heads have their ways of operating which are honestly fucked and inhumane. I’m sorry that you had to go through this whole shit show so quickly but luckily most of the hard part is over.” He

seemed so caring so comforting which was so weird compared to the cryptic, cold, sadistic, and broken personalities I have experience prior.

“What is Project Chimera?” I asked him.

He then took a long pause before saying, “A glimmer of hope in a dark time. I’m sorry for the corny response but that’s all I can really tell you right now. Just know that this project will make you stronger than you ever thought possible and no matter how sadistic the tests you will face seem, just know that they are necessary.”

Just as he finished his sentence, I heard the heart monitor screeching frantically and the doctor quickly rushed over to me but I couldn’t tell why, I mean I felt fine at that moment all things considered. That was until I saw my reflection in the periphery of my vision, my body was convulsing and my mouth looked like it was about to snap off of my jaw because of how wide it was. The pain was too much for me to handle so I physically couldn’t feel anything while my body was reacting in complete agony. My mind was completely separated from my body at that moment until the doctor grabbed a defibrillator and slammed it on my chest. The second the jolts from that machine connected to my body, I was no longer separated from the pain. It was so unbearable, like my insides were being destroyed from the inside out. Once my brain was once again synchronized with my body, everything but my mind shut down: I couldn’t breathe, I couldn’t move, and I couldn’t hear. That was when the doctor grabbed a huge syringe and stabbed it directly into my chest. He quickly pressed on the plunger and I was able to twitch a few fingers before more feeling began to slowly return. The doctor then continued to defibrillate my chest until it was able to rise and fall on its own signifying that my breathing was restored. I then instinctively jolted my body forwards and clenched my heart as tight as possible. The pain was going away slowly but at least I was somewhat stable. Eventually, the doctor eased me back

down to a lying position before administering a much smaller injection in my arm which both completely alleviated the pain and made me very tired.

Living In Hell

First day on the job and I lost consciousness four times. But anyway, when I next opened my eyes, I was back in my room without a straightjacket this time. I was just anticipating what would go wrong next and who would either cause it or enter the room as a result. This did not happen though, hours must have passed, then a day. I know that a day must have passed as without anything to occupy my time, counting the minutes was my only source of entertainment.

Eventually, I did hear footsteps approach my door and I was hoping it was the doctor checking on me. Was it him that I saw enter through my door? No, it was the bastard that glued these metal blades to me. Instantly, a wave of intense anger and fear permeated my body and I could feel my heart pulsing extremely quickly. This intense beating resulted in even more intense pain and I could also feel a strange tingling sensation emanating from my mark as if it were reacting to something. I then see this man grin his toothy smile and the pain only grew.

“What the fuck did you do to me you monster!?” I managed to yell through bated breathes.

“Monster? I’m not a monster. All I did was improve you. No one could have predicted your reaction to the process.” He said this so matter of factly, with such cunning and lack of remorse. It felt like I was talking to the devil himself.

All I could do at that moment was glare at him while attempting to hide my obvious fear and trembling.

“You can’t just do this to people!” I screamed.

“Oh yes I can. You made a deal for your freedom remember. A deal which ensured that you will comply with whatever is asked of you/done to you. Oh, and people, trust me, you are not a person... Well, not anymore at least.” He said this in such an authoritative voice which covered me in goosebumps. He was telling me that he was in control and that I had no say in what was done to me. I was nothing but a speck of dirt and there was nothing I could do about it.

I seriously wanted to punch this man but my pounding heart and the strange feeling pulsing from my mark prevented me from moving.

“Look, we can do this the easy way or the hard way. I honestly don’t care which option you choose but either way, I am getting what I came here for.” He said as he grabbed another syringe from his pocket. Seeing the shot and remembering what this motherfucker did to me last time, my instincts turned primal and my pain was ignored as I pounced at the man like a wild tiger.

“Hard way it is.” He said almost disappointedly as he then pressed the same button as before causing the metal restraints to deploy from my bed and attach to my hands. I was right in front of him when they began to retract and force me back into the bed. I tried to break out of them as they couldn’t completely wrap around my arms due to my blades which made them loose enough for me to wriggle my wrists around. This was a bad idea as the more I resisted the hold of those restraints, the more they tightened around my arms. It was like a Japanese finger trap was turned into shackles. Despite the pain in my chest slowly returning, I continued to try and break free to that guys amusement.

Eventually, the pain completely returned and my body went limp. With my struggling over, the asshole in front of me actually frowned as if losing his main source of

entertainment. Then he closed the distance between us and wrapped a tourniquet around my arm and stuck that needle into my forearm. This time, he didn't inject me with anything and instead, he drew blood. And surprisingly, this time he seemed to be operating with more care for my well being which really rubbed me the wrong way.

After slowly drawing a sufficient amount of blood, he patched my arm or and left the room without a word. My heart was still pounding like a drum as I was still restrained and afraid that he wasn't done with me. Luckily for me, the restraints let go of my arms within the next five minutes. Once the restraints released their grasp on my arms, my rapid heart rate returned to normal and the tingling from my neck stopped.

Maybe ten minutes later, I hear a knock on my door and was taken aback as it seemed like everyone in this insane facility just enters when they wish.

"Uh, come in." I said almost like a question because I was so confused.

The door then slowly opened to reveal it was the woman from before and she was carrying a metal tray. But unlike the last time, she seemed more afraid instead of being a walking corpse. She walked slowly, was trembling, and it was obvious that she was trying her best to not make eye contact with me. She was afraid of me which confused me even more as I was essentially powerless while in this room. She then slowly placed the tray on my bed and said, or more stuttered "You should eat." Before rushing out of the room.

When the door closed, I glanced at the tray and noticed a liftable cover to which I took off revealing a steak, peas, a water bottle, a napkin, and a fork and knife. It's funny, I was so influenced by fear, pain, and anxiety that I completely ignored the fact that it had been days since I last ate. And once I realized that fact, almost on cue, my stomach began growling like a wild animal and I just began eating. Granted, the idea that the food could have been drugged did cross

my mind but I was too hungry to care. The steak was both filling and delicious and after I finished the meal, I placed the tray next to my bed and simply tried to rest for a little and clear my head.

Right before I could drift off to sleep, I heard another knock on the door and again I gave the person on the other side the go ahead. The person who entered my room was someone completely new to me. He was of average height (maybe 5'8), caucasian, very thin, and had many scars and stitches around his right arm. I can't really remember what he was wearing but I do remember the thin glasses and thousand yard stare he was giving me. This man was also holding a clipboard and a pill canister. He then looked at my confused expression and rolled his eyes.

"I doubt I need to tell you about what happened after your injection correct." He said.

"Near organ failure I think the doctor said." I responded with slight confusion as I was still trying to understand what this guys deal was.

He simply rolled his eyes again and said "Half right. Your vital organs did nearly shut down due to the haphazardness of you introduction to the process but that wasn't the only thing that happened. Your body chemistry also began to mutate at an astonishing rate. This change was so abrupt and combined with the intense strain of emotional and physical pain from being given your weapons, your body kicked into overdrive in order to adapt to the sudden internal changes which proved too much and caused your near organ failure. While the majority of the damage to your body was treatable, your heart is another story. It was too damaged by the mutation that we couldn't fully heal it like your other organs." He said this so coldly as if he had no idea he was talking to another person and telling them something terrifying.

“What does that mean?” I asked him now understandably horrified by the fact that they mutated me and I could have died.

He adjusted his glasses with his middle and index finger before continuing, “You can’t be serious. There is no way that you haven’t already felt a major difference in your body?” He said as if baffled by my inability to understand.

“What does that mean?” I asked slowly and now more pissed off as this guys attitude was seriously getting under my nerves.

“Heart damaged. Beats faster under stress. Causes pain. Lots of pain.” He said this as if I were a two year old and that stretched past my last nerve so I punched him right in the face. After I made contact with his face, I saw his glasses drop to the floor obviously broken. He screamed in pain and I hate to admit it but it was like music to my ears as he definitely deserved that and I even told him so. He simply clutched his eye with one hand and threw the canister in my direction.

“Just take your heart medicine you ass.” He said trying to sound tough but I knew he was in shock over the fact that I actually hit him.

He then stormed out of the room and I studied the canister as I was not just going to take a random drug without knowledge of what it is/does. From what I read, the medication will strengthen my heart enough so it doesn’t paralyze me when things go wrong while also healing it. Granted I did ponder the idea that they could have simply written that on the canister when in reality the pills will just knock me out so they can continue experimenting on me. After a while of debating whether or not I should take any of the medication, I deduced that I am definitely more valuable at full strength and alive rather than in a vegetative state or dead so I chose to observe the recommended dosage and it stated that two pills a day is recommended.

Luckily I didn't finish all the water from my lunch so I simply placed two of the pills (which were more capsules now that I think of it) and popped them in my mouth before taking a short gulp of water.

Another day passed by and I was seriously starting to smell so I decided to leave my room. I opened the door and walked down the whiter than white hallway. I had zero clue on where to go but I had to find someone as the smell was really beginning to get to me. I was walking straight down that hallway for at least ten minutes when I came across a large doorway where I could hear movement through. Hoping for actual human interaction, I entered through those doors which looking back was a terrible idea. Where I entered appeared to be an indoor desert wasteland with sand as far as the eye could see but there were also metal walls and a ceiling overhead. At first I was in awe of this place but then I heard two clicks and the next thing I knew, there were two grenades at my feet. I was frozen in place in fear and couldn't do anything to stop these already counting down grenades. But there was no boom, no explosion, no death. Instead, smoke clouds were expelled from the two objects and within seconds, my vision was obscured. I attempted to find the door but the second I did, I heard rattling and saw a flash bang.

"Oh Shit!" I quickly yelled before becoming immobile from the intensity of the flash bang. Eventually, I was able to make it to my feet but the door was apparently locked.

"Mr. Petros." I hear an authoritative voice echo from seemingly nowhere say, "Welcome to Project Chimera. We hope you've had enough time to recover your injuries as your training shall now commence.

“What the fuck did I get myself into?” I asked myself before sighing and asking the disembodied voice “So what do I need to do?” I said this with an extremely unamused and uninterested tone.

The answer, while brief gave me shivers along with overwhelming anticipation and confusion. The voice responded with one, single, word. “SURVIVE.”

Barely having any time to process that, I managed to spot an ever-growing shadow next to me and when I looked up, I saw a black figure with spears protruding from beneath its hands. The figure was getting closer and closer and looked ready to strike so I instinctively dodged the attack and countered with a sweep kick in an attempt to force my assailant to the ground, but it was no use. This shadowy figure in front of me was both resilient and incredibly stocky making him hard to move.

I say him as his figure was too bulky for a female.

The second my kick landed, the figure attempted to drive one of his spears into my side. This was no sparing match or training regiment, this was a battle for survival. This man was trying to kill me. This realization both terrified me but also helped kick my survival instincts into full throttle. I rolled to my left and dodged his blades only by an inch and instantly, I was back on my feet. I was expecting for this man to immediately charge at me but instead, the two of us simply stood parallel to each other and sizing one another up.

It was during this when I was able to gaze into his eyes as they were the only part of him exposed from his shadowy black appearance. Those eyes were haunting, remember when I said the man who got Nina and I out of prison had eyes which were serpent-like? Well this guys eyes were completely reptilian. A thin slitted pupil without an iris and its color was a neon green. Writing this out doesn't even do them the slightest bit of justice but I just had to state how

disturbing those eyes were. Then I noticed a weird noise which sounded like a viper hissing. No, I was exactly like a vipers hiss and it was emanating from his mouth area. My body was now completely tensed up and I then noticed the slits of his eyes dilating. Me being apprehensive towards what his next move was decided to strike first. I rotated my body so it looked like I was going to hit him with my right hand and at that moment, everything appeared to me in slow motion. I saw him slowly move to avoid my right blow but that was my plan. As he moved opposite of my hit, I used my feet to kick up sand into this guys face and hit him with my left hand.

That was my plan at least but the distraction of the sand didn't faze him at all. So thinking on my feet, I just threw a punch to this guys chest and he did the same. My blade pierced him directly in the left pectoral and I could see blood starting to drip out of the wound and through his outfit.

At first I thought I had won but no, I looked down and saw that he managed to stick me near the waist with his right spear. He fell down and I was left standing not fully feeling the pain from the wound. It didn't feel that deep inside me so I decided to remove it myself as it seemed stuck.

I gripped the spear with my right hand and immediately retracted as that spear was covered in small, sharp barbs. My hands started bleeding so I wrapped the barb with the bottom of my shirt and managed to pull it out. Along with the spear, some blood and tissue exited the wound but as far as I felt, I was no worse for wear. The second I let go of the spear, it retreated back into the guy's arm along with the other spear. I was about to leave when I realized the hissing was still continuing. That hissing was predatory but I couldn't understand how he

could still attack after being stabbed. It was then that I felt a weird tingling sensation from my stab wound and when I looked down, I saw an amber-like liquid pouring out of my wound.

“What th—“ Is all I could attempt to say as my body started to convulse. My breathing became erratic, my heart rate was once again beating at an overwhelming pace, my muscles turned numb, my vision started to fade, and I tasted a minty flavor on my tongue before my body completely collapsed due to my symptoms. I hit the sandy floor and the final sight I could see was the bright glow of my opponents eyes before completely fainting.

When I next opened my eyes I searched my surrounding and noticed that one, I was once again in a doctors office (not the one from before as this looked more like an emergency room) and two, although a sheet was covering me, I was naked. To say I felt uncomfortable would be an understatement but for some reason, I also strangely felt clean. That was when I realized that I must have been cleaned while my injuries were treated as I also saw that my stab wound was stitched up.

Eventually, I looked around the room and saw that my opponent was across from me. He was thankfully wearing pants which I could see through his thin, almost see-through sheet. His chest was completely covered in bandages and what appeared to be numerous scars bulging out of nearly every inch of his body. He was clearly unconscious so I decided to study the man who stabbed me. I then looked upwards and saw that what I was looking at, it wasn't human. I honestly thought I was dreaming the second I saw its face and that was when I realized that those scars covering its body weren't scars at all, they were scales. His face and body were covered in skin colored scales. His skin looked almost leathery and his hair actually combined with his beard to form what looked like a snake with its mouth agape. I was just feet away from a snake man who obviously poisoned me. I was now covered in sweat and my heart rate spiked

once more due to my fear causing the monitor that I was attached to, to blare. I was then flooded with this intense heavy feeling in my chest and the next thing I knew, my breathing was stifling and I could barely move.

Within seconds of the machine blaring, the same doctor that originally treated me came rushing in and began examining me.

“Vlad. Vlad! Calm down! You’re safe.” He said as he was trying to restore my heart rate to normal but it all came out muffled to me, like my ears were underwater and someone was yelling for me above water. I was glad he was once again the doctor aiding me but all I could do is fixate on the monster laying down just in front of me. He tried chest compressions and some other methods which I cannot remember but it was no use. He then followed my eyes to the snake man and let out a pissed off grunt.

“Seriously? Seriously?” He questioned angrily as he tapped his fingers on his ear. I assume he was using a device to communicate with someone.

“I thought I told you he can’t handle this at the rate your going. You can’t just introduce all this stuff to him one after the other.” He said annoyed before taking a short pause and closing the curtain which blocked my view of the creature.

“I know. I know! Look I understand that his reactions are unpredictable to do the circumstances but that doesn’t mean he needs to be put under such stress, nearly killed, and be forced to undergo the process so quickly.” He explained in a near yell.

“What is he talking about? And what is this process I keep hearing about?” I asked myself through involuntary spasms.

The doctor then looked at me and then to the curtain containing that beast and simply said “NO!” before seemingly hanging up. He then grabbed a water bottle and poured this

purple looking powder into it and then mixed it until the water turned completely purple. He then handed it to me without saying anything as he was obviously annoyed and because he was the only person in this entire place that treated me like a human, I trusted him enough to drink it. I shakily grabbed the bottle and slowly brought it up to my mouth hoping that I wouldn't have another spasm before I could drink it. I managed to pour it into my mouth and there was a strange flavor to the liquid. I think it was grape flavoring but I could still taste a powdery substance inside the liquid. Once I swallowed, I was covered in goosebumps but gradually, the machine got quieter and my body started to relax.

It took me a while but I was finally able to ask him the question pounding away at my mind, "What. The fuck. Is that thing?" I asked slowly as I pointed to the bed that the snake was laying on.

He responded by rubbing his eyes and pinching his nose while groaning. He then took a deep breathe and told me what was going on.

"Look, like I said before, the way this place operates is sadistic but the goal it has is very necessary? But the actual goal of this operation is borderline insane. You see, after the scare we had two years ago with monsters showing up and a man with actual superpowers ending up being the cause, we had to create a countermeasure incase that situation would happen again. What many people forgot after the events of that summer were all the crazy government conspiracy theories surrounding gene splicing. Well, this actually worked to our advantage as without being a hot topic of the public, many scientists could work more freely and we made incredible leaps in science." He said this as if feeling nostalgic but I could see he was likely about to go off on a tangent so I interrupted.

"Ok but what does gene splicing have to do with that event?" I asked.

“Well, when the world governments were able to join the fights after the initial shock, we realized that traditional weapons wouldn’t work. Then we saw the group responsible for destroying those monsters, they were each somewhat human with interesting powers which gave us the idea of creating our own super humans through mutations and weaponry. Now I know how insane that must sound in fact, it sounds like something out of a comic book. But trust me when I say that the original tests did actually yield results. By combining the fused weapons and the animalistic powers that came with the animal DNA, we concluded that this process was a success.” He explained excitedly.

“Why animal DNA? Moreover, why choose me?” I asked very confused and intrigued by his convoluted story.

“Imagine a person who can run as fast as a cheetah, cling to walls like a lizard, camouflage like a chameleon, or even achieve flight like an eagle. Compared to normal soldiers, these superhumans, these chimeras would be unbeatable. So we recruited the best soldiers we could find and they underwent the process. Now we couldn’t be sure that even our new and improved soldiers could actually handle such a threat as that of two years ago. So imagine our elation when we actually managed to capture one of those monsters and were able to test out our soldiers’s new abilities in order to gage their effectiveness.”

“So is that the monster?” I asked hoping he would say yes as the alternative was much more terrifying.

“Heavens no, that thing has been dead for just over a year now.” My eyes then widened as I could tell what the doctor was about to say next, “That is the soldier who killed it.” He said trying to humanize that thing across the room. He was actually one of the original chimeras.”

I swear, if I wasn't on medication right now, my heart would have exploded then and there.

"So am I going to... You know... Turn into that?" I asked while stuttering in fear.

"In all honesty, I cannot give you a definitive answer. Some subjects experience incredible physical changes while others still look the same as they did before the process." He said in an attempt to give me some hope but it really was too late for hope in my eyes. "I am going to turn into a monster. I will never be able to look Nina in the eye ever again." were the only thoughts I could think of.

"Don't worry, while I did say changes are unpredictable, you have to put in consideration that he was one of the first subjects so we were still working through things when it came to the DNA mutations. While there are still some subjects who go through drastic changes, there are even more who don't." He said reassuringly.

"Don't worry? You just told me that you mutated me into a gene spliced animal human hybrid who could turn out more beast than man so how am I supposed to remain calm?" I yelled out with tears now flowing down my cheeks.

Just before I could answer, the hissing returned and I heard grunts of pain coming from behind the curtain. Then I hear the curtain being pulled to the side and the metal rings clanking. I see that face again and my guard is literally through the roof.

"Hey doc, can you raise the heat in here. It's freezing." He said this so casually and his voice sounded so normal that if it weren't for his appearance, he would be a completely normal guy. I actually started to feel bad for how I reacted when I saw his face but I still am not going to let my guard down.

“Okay.” The doctor said almost glad that our conversation was interrupted. He then left the room for to raise the heat I guess which left me and him in the same room.

He must have noticed my attempts of not looking at him because he said, “I get it, trust me it’sss no picnic for me either.” He said in a comforting tone.

“I’m sorry but it’s just-“ I tried to say but he cut me off.

“Not what you ex-pected? I understand, trust me I was also in your shoes.” He said.

“Well yeah, I thought I was having an everyday fight to the death with an average guy.” I said as a joke in hopes of alleviating the tension to which he actually laughed a little.

“Yeah I know. The higher ups really ssuck at transitioning ussss. Leaving out information, bringing us into lethal fightsss within a seconds notice.” He said.

“Are you extending your s’s on purpose?” I asked once again attempting to alleviate my anxiety and break the tension.

“Bad habit. Started out as a joke but now I can hardly sstop myself.” He claimed.

“So, you’ve definitely been here longer. So does it get easier.” I asked.

“Easier? Hell no. If anything, it gets harder but you’ll get ussed to it. Things won’t faze you as much after you’ve been here long enough. Like a routine I guess.” He claimed which honestly calmed me down a bit knowing he was being honest.

“So was the transformation painful?” I asked.

He chuckled and responded with, “You know, never in my year in this hellhole has anyone asked me that. I don’t think I’m the best person to ask though because I’ve been here the longest so my process is probably different from your own. But, I guess the actual transformation cannot be too different. It was, difficult, still is actually. One day I was your

everyday, dime a dozen soldier and then after a while, these scales began appearing all over my body. It started out with just a few and then within a few months, I was covered in these things. Then my vision got extremely blurry for about a week and when it cleared up, my eyes were neon and my pupils went from circles to slits. Then after that, when it got dark, I was able to see infrared. It's not like I can turn it on or off though. If its light, I can see normal, dark and everything is infrared. After that, almost overnight, my nails literally fused with my fingers and turned into claws. I'd say the transformation, at least for me was more irritating than painful as the only part of it that I was awake for was my eyesight changing. Well, that's actually not true, after like eight months of starting this... I began experiencing these crippling bursts of pain which wouldn't go away. Turns out my body was starting to produce venom. It's actually what I used to knock you out. Going through that was hell but eventually the doc made a medication which nulled the effects it had on me." He explained this so concisely but he didn't seem nervous at all, if anything, he was eager to get his story heard by someone.

"Trust me though, the worst pain is already over." He said reassuringly.

"Somehow I doubt that." I said.

"Really, because I couldn't help but notice your blades. Those couldn't have been attached painlessly, not in this place at least." He said skeptically.

"Oh, your right that was hell. So wait, what was your reaction to being introduced to such sadistic torture?" I asked.

"Well it was different for me, I actually signed up for this, I wasn't given all the information but I still entered this shit show willingly as it was my duty for my country. They gave me my spring loaded venom spears and sslowly injected me with the mutagens. They didn't tell me what to expect so when the scales started appearing I was horrified and I couldn't sleep at

night when my face turned to this. But eventually, I guess I became desensitized. You're a lucky one though, you're a part of the third wave. The first one had really drastic changes but those were mostly cleared up in the second." He claimed and this actually put me at ease as in all honesty, the more I look at him, the more comfortable I get around him. And the fact that the change might not be so drastic for me was very comforting as it meant I won't scare Nina.

I then heard footsteps getting closer to the door and expected it to be the doctor, but no, it was the bastard who attached the blades to my arms again. I immediately tense up and I can see the other guy doing the same. His look probably mirrored my own and I could tell he was thinking the same thing as me. We were going to jump him but before we could, he pressed his button again restraining us to our beds.

"Seriously, I can understand him (looking at me), But you have been here for a year, you know how this dance goes." He said mockingly at the two of us as he took out another one of those grenades launcher needles. He did the same thing the lady did by charging it up and the second he was done, he approached me slowly and he was pointing it to my neck. I was once again trying to break free but those shackles only tightened. He then stuck that thing directly into my mark and something immediately started feeling wrong. It was like the popped out veins in my neck were being repulsed by the serum. It was like feeling my own heart beat through the veins without even touching them. But then things got worse, the door slammed open with such force that it startled the bastard and he accidentally caused the serum to flow into me at a much quicker rate. Once it stopped flowing, a huge shockwave entered my body and the mark felt like it was growing. Like how hair feels when it stands on end but internally. I then see a blur and the next thing I knew, the jackass was on the ground. I look up to see the doctor clenching his fist.

"I told you to leave him alone!" He yelled.

To that, the asshole gradually rose back up and said “And I told you that you have no say in the matter.” He claimed in a creepily composed manner before packing up the grenade launcher, whispering something in the doctor ear, and exiting the room.

Funnily enough, we all said in unison “Man I hate that guy.”

The doctor then looked at my neck and I saw his eyes go wide. His look one of repulsion and abject horror.

“What, what is going on.” I asked worried for what is happening.

“Ugh, well those black veins are stretching across your neck. I’m going to be honest with you when I say I have zero idea on what to do.” He said while his eyes were transfixed on my mark.

“The hell do you mean stretching across my neck?” I asked to which he slowly walked over to a desk and pulled out a mirror and showed me my reflection.

It was just as he said, whereas my mark was originally a clump of veins on my neck, now it was breaking up into multiple veins and extending to my collarbone.

“What the fuck happened!?” I asked angrily.

“I seriously don’t know what he did.” He said nervously as my vision began to blur again.

“Oh come on! Another blackout?!” I screamed internally as this was happening far too often.

“Vlad! Vlad! Stay with me!” Is the only thing I heard before I was out cold.

When I next opened up my eyes, I was in a dark room and a door opened letting the smallest glimmers of light pollute the room. Then the light flooded the dark space and I saw

Nina walk in slowly but cautiously. I then saw out of the corner what looked like me faced down and crouched in the corner. She approached me and whatever was in my body growled and said in a deep primal voice “GO AWAY!”

This took Nina aback for a moment before she continued towards this doppelgänger and said “Vlad, it’s me.”

“I know. Which is why you have to leave.” My double growled.

“But Vlad I-“ She spoke before touching my shoulder. This caused my twin to slowly turn to face her and that sight scared me to my core, still does actually. It was me but almost skeletal. My skin was as thin as paper, and stretched on my bones like latex. My eyes were wide, angry, and my irises were like pin pricks that were glowing a bright yellow. Lastly there were my teeth, they were sharp as daggers, large, and covered in red. Seeing this sight horrified Nina and she attempted to run away but it was too late. Her screams still haunt me to this day. I didn’t see what happened next thankfully as that was when I woke up.

When I did wake up, I literally jumped out of the bed due to the fear from that nightmare still lingering. Those screams were still ringing in my ear from that dream and when my bare feet hit the cold, stone floor, a sharp, intense wave of pain overwhelmed me and I dropped to the ground. A small puddle of blood was forming underneath my body and I almost immediately understood the cause. I had accidentally stabbed myself with my own blades. There were numerous paper cut sized openings in my flesh with a minor amount of blood coming out of each. Alone it was barely any blood, but having twelve cuts on my chest and arms meant more blood. Now while this did hurt, it was nothing compared to the emotional, physical, and internal torture these bastards put me through.

Then, I remember what the doctor told me. How he explained that I was being mutated into a hybrid creature. How I was going to change. How I may look like that snake man.

You have no idea how much of a mental strain these thoughts had on me. But soon my internal struggle was interrupted by the door slightly opening and the food tray being placed into the room through the small opening. The door then shut quickly and I was able to hear my stomach growling.

I stood up slowly, still weak from my accidentally self inflicted wounds as well as all the shit I had been put through since I entered this hellhole. Luckily the blood ended its flowing out of my body as I approached the food. As I walked, I noticed that I was indeed wearing pants, but still no shirt. Along with the cuts and bruises, there were stitches covering my left pectoral and lower torso. I simply shook my head and chose to simply focus on the food as filling my stomach appeared as the only happy thought possible in my current situation. I opened the top to the tray and above my food was a large notebook perhaps the width of a bible. It was carefully wrapped in a see-through plastic coating and I thought “Maybe this is the overall objective of Project Chimera along with the details, tests, and other information.”

Yes, I realize now that that thought was idiotic as no smart, secretive organization would allow anyone, especially its experiments gaze upon the specifics. Either way, I tore through the plastic like a child ripping open the wrappings to a Christmas present and discovered that instead of information, it was actually a gift.

I opened the large notebook and flipped through the pages revealing that the entirety of the book besides the first page were completely blank. I scrolled through the Lines of nothingness before returning to page one.

“Dear Vlad, I know that this doesn’t even start to cover all the hell you’ve been going through but trust me when I say that writing helps. Throughout my stay in this god forsaken place I have zero doubt that I would have gone insane if not for my ability to write. It is not only therapeutic but it allows you to get some stuff off your chest during our periods of isolation. Some of the others have their own ways in dealing with the shit thrown at us but many of us have taken to using this as an outlet. Some make stories, others use the pages to draw, while others just vent by writing down our life stories. I know that you’ve been through hell (The doc informed me of your story and how you ended up here) and I want you to know that you have someone that can sympathize with your situation. While I don’t have a relative being cared for like you, I can guarantee you that your sister couldn’t be in better hands. They might treat us like shit but they wouldn’t dare go back on a promise like the one they made to you. Please accept this gift and I hope that it will help you along the way.

Sincerely,

Apophis

“Apophis huh. Must be the snake man. Who else would fit the namesake of the great serpent deity?” I thought to myself.

Now, I am nowhere from an expert on mythology, but I am no slouch either. I know my stuff and can recognize the names of ancient Gods, Deities, and monsters by name fairly easily.

“I wonder if I’ll get a cool codename.” I chuckled a little in an attempt to relieve some of my fear but it was in vain. That being said, it did arise some curiosity. He wasn’t named Apophis just because it sounded cool, the name was obviously given as it correlates with his serpentine mutation. And when he stated “the others”, how many of us are there. At that

moment, I decided that I should really stop pressing into all these thoughts as the more I think about it, the more stressed I get.

I simply place the book to my side and am able to finally see the food they prepared for me. But on top of the food was a pack of mechanical pencils in a plastic bag. I placed that to the side and was actually disappointed in what was brought to me. I was grateful that I was given food but still, what would you say if the first meal after passing out from a drug related accident was a stack of soggy pancakes already glazed with syrup making it very mushy. I knew I couldn't be choosy but still this was far from an ideal breakfast. At least next to it was some water that I could use to wash it down along with a small packet with a note telling me to take it with the water. I decided to open the packet first and I saw a powdery substance inside it so I poured it into the bottle and drank it little by little as I washed down the pancakes.

Once I am finished with those sorry excuses for pancakes I decided to write down my story in the notebook which is why the events of this story you are reading are as descriptive as possible. I wanted my story to be heard somehow and whether I would be alive for that to happen or not, I just want for someone to stumble upon it and know what happened. I had some struggles with recalling some of the conversations I had but, I was able to remember enough detail on how those conversations transpired to be able to properly record them. how I remember As I began to write, I realized that the message Apophis gave me wouldn't make sense in the beginning of the story of my life so I ripped it out. Now despite having days, maybe even weeks separating the present from Nina and I escaping Russia, the details that mattered were burned into my mind allowing me to easily describe what happened. And now, we are here in the present, well, at least for me anyway.

A Day of Hope

Okay so writing my story has truly awakened a part of me that I had thought was dead. Using this pencil and notebook brought me a comfort that I thought was impossible to obtain in a place like this. In fact, while recording the events which lead up to today, I completely lost track of time and when I finished, I noticed two more food trays in the corner of my room. Apparently in my transfixed state, the rest of the day came and went.

As I had nothing left to write, I sat the notebook and pencil onto my bed and ate both my lunch and dinner. Both of which were ten times more visually appealing to the garbage breakfast I received. The lunch tray had two slices of pizza and some bread while my dinner consisted of a large plate of baked ziti. Despite the fact that I unintentionally ignored the pizza for who knows how long while I was writing, it was still warm and delicious and the baked ziti was exquisite. When I was done, I took my heart medication and decided to retire for the day and go to sleep. I am only writing this down as I have very little entertain currently besides writing my tale and I also want whoever is reading this to know that while I was by all means a prisoner, they did still treat me somewhat decently when it came to food. I was about to go to sleep when the door creaked open once more and my uniform was thrown inside. I decided to place it back on and retired to my bed.

If you were to ask me what I expected for this day, I would have answered with some type of sadistic torture or a death-match but instead, today actually filled me with hope and dare I say happiness. When I woke up, I decided to leave my room once more to get everything over with and so I wouldn't have to see the asshole again. I roamed around the hallways and eventually came across the giant doors that lead into the training facility. As I wrote before, I just wanted to get things over with. But when I attempted to open it, it was locked. I then heard a grunt come from my left and when I turned, I almost crapped myself in fear. Next to me was an

absolute hulk of a man. His entire appearance screamed “Don’t fuck with me if you want to live.”

I was trembling like a wet dog as this behemoth of a man stared down at me. He had to be above 6’5 and he towered over my 6’1 body. And while I was almost pure muscle, he looked like the definition of steroids although it was obvious that those muscles were natural. His uniform consisted of the German flag in the center along with white outlines making the head of a bear. Surrounding the uniform were also these pure white objects which looked like massive claws but I knew they were just for aesthetics. I then wanted to see this guys weapons and no joke, from his forearms and up, his arms were covered in armor. There were armor-like plates shielding his elbows and his hands were inside of what looked like metal gloves with claws instead of fingers. Then I looked up and let me tell you, his face matched the intensity his body had. He had dirty blonde hair styled in a crew cut which transitioned to a 5:00 shadow. The left side of his face, particularly beneath his eye had a few long scars but what caught me the most off guard were his eyes. They were a piercing brown and honestly looked like the eyes of a bear.

“Ah, you like what you see?” He said in a thick, booming German accent.

“I...Uh...I” is all I could get out before he starts laughing.

“Hahahahaha!! Don’t worry I won’t hurt you...Yet.” He said as if speaking to a friend.

“YET!? Is he going to kill me? Am I going to be his punching bag? He looks like he could eat me for breakfast and still have room for more.” These were all thoughts plaguing my mind but he once again interrupted by stating “Wow. Learn to take a joke man. I am simply saying that one day you and I will be fighting in here.”

I simply stayed quiet as I have no clue how he thought what he was saying was normal. But then again, the guy probably had a few screws loose.

“Never seen you here before. You a third wave?” He asked as he bent down to eye level.

I simply responded shakily with a “Yes and you.”

“Nah, I’m second wave. They call me Artaios.” He said proudly.

“Nice to meet you I’m Vlad.” I say trying to hide my fear as I extended my hand.

“I like the curtesy but handshakes are not in your best interest. Well, at least with me.” He said before laughing again.

“Okay. So can you help me around. I still have no clue on what is what in this place.” I asked.

“Sure.” He said with a shrug.

He then started to walk away from the door into a hallway that looked more like a school hallway as the floors were tiled and the doors looked wooden with small windows which allowed me a glimpse inside. Some rooms were empty and others had silhouettes of multiple individuals. He then stopped when there was no hallway left and on each side of him there were two massively large doors.

“One’s the pool and the other is the training room.” He said nonchalantly.

“I thought that door was the training room?” I asked in confusion as I pointed to where we started.

“Well, that’s more of a combat room or a sparing room while this is specifically meant for one person at a time.”

“So why wasn’t I told about all these facilities?” I asked.

“Well you just started so they want you to experience the bad before receiving the good. Sort of like a gift for your troubles.” He stated in a way that showed he really didn’t know the reason either.

“So let me guess, off limits for me.” I said rolling my eyes.

“Yep.” He said bluntly.

“So why’d you bring me here?” I asked annoyed.

“Two reasons. The first being you asked me to and I was bored. The second is that with the sparing room already occupied, I was going to head to the training room anyway.” He states.

Just then, the doors to the training room opened and a woman with piercing maroon eyes and short black hair left the room with a towel wrapped over her shoulder. She was wearing a sporty tank top without a country flag or animal and was wearing a necklace with the Star of David on it. She then batted a glance at Artaios.

“Enjoy.” Was all she said and it was in a carefree tone which was odd as behind it, I could tell she was trying to piss the guy off.

“Dammit Ix, if you destroyed the equipment again I swear I’ll.” He says as his anger grows so much that I can literally feel the tension. But she simply cuts him off as she pounces into the air and swiftly and quickly managed to put him into a rear naked choke hold and easily brought him to the ground. “You’ll do what?” She asked as she got up.

He was out cold so he couldn’t answer and I simply was stuck in place and didn’t want to piss this woman off.

She then notices me for the first time and to relieve the tension said, “Don’t worry I don’t bite, he and I are just rivals when it comes to training.” Although she said this to put me

at ease, her demeanor changed from playful to unenthusiastic. It seemed like she didn't enjoy socializing so her attempts in being social just made things feel awkward.

I then looked at her weapons which looked like metal plates which began at her wrists and ended at her knuckles and on top of the plates were small blades that looked like they came from a switchblade.

"I'm Ixchel but everyone calls me Ix." She said still unenthused.

"The Jaguar Goddess?" I asked to which she perked up and actually smiled. This smile actually broke the unease and she actually seemed happy.

"Yes actually. Who are you?" She asked.

"Vlad." I answered to which she batted an eyebrow.

"Like Vlad Dracula, the vampire king." She asked with actual enthusiasm.

"No that's just the name I was born with." I remarked.

"Downer." She said.

Now this woman had a distinct accent which I just couldn't pinpoint and I was trying to wrack my brain to try and figure it out but just couldn't. And let me tell you, once the nerves were gone and I could fully see this woman, all I could see was beauty. She was very beautiful and definitely could hold her own in a fight which I found really cool.

Then it seemed like she just realized something and began walking away but Artaios grabbed her leg saying "I'm not done yet."

Bad move, she turned quickly and her face displayed a look of intense anger before she kicked the dude in the chest incapacitating him.

She then took a deep breathe before continuing on and with her back to me, she extended her left hand up and said "See you around Vlad."

This made me happy even though this girl's unpredictability still unnerved me. I then looked down at Artaios and saw him coughing. I decided to help the guy up and no joke he had to have weighed 300 pounds at least. I struggled but eventually managed to get him to his feet and walked him to a nearby bench. He thanked me and the two of us had some random chat that I honestly can't remember what it was about but knowing his shtick, it probably was irrelevant and had no importance judging from his screw loose personality.

Eventually, I decided to go back to my room as I was technically not even supposed to be here. Eventually I made it to the hallway with the rooms and I then realized that I had no clue which room was mine as I never re-entered my room consciously. But as I made my way down the hallway, I saw the snake man, or I guess Apophis standing against a door looking bored out of his mind. I got closer to him and waved the second he lifted his head to face me to which he perked up.

"Hey." He said.

"Hey." I replied as I stared at his outfit, his tank top had ripped sleeves with a design that looked like snake scales. In the center was an American flag with a white serpent outlined over it.

"I hope you like the gift I ssent you." He stated.

"Yeah, it really did help calm me down when I began writing." I replied.

"I'm glad." He said.

"So, why are you here Apophis?" I asked.

"What do you mean? These are the living quarterz where we all.. well you know, live." He remarked

“I mean, you obviously have access to the training rooms and other areas as you’re a first wave so it’s a little weird that you are just standing here.” I explained.

“I’m actually here for you.” He said calmly.

“Another fight?” I questioned to myself.

“What for?” I asked.

His next words were literally what I’ve been waiting for ever since I entered this place. “Video conference.”

I knew he meant Nina from the way he spoke. He seemed happy for me which meant this conference was for my benefit and something I should be excited for. He then waved to signal me to follow him as he began walking down the hallway opposite to the training facilities. We were walking down that hall for what had to have been two minutes when Apophis abruptly stops in his tracks and that was when I heard the screams, the same shrieks of pain and terror that I heard when I first entered this facility. Those screams and shrieks were coming from a huge vault looking door. It looked like nothing placed behind it was ever meant to leave. Those wails were messing with my head, disrupting my thoughts and making my transfix on those ungodly sounds. Now that I was closer to the vault compared to last time, I realized something, those voices, while animalistic when you first hear them, are warped and distorted. Imagine recording a blood curdling shriek, amplifying it, distorting the voice, adding some white noise, and overlapping it with an animals shrieks of pain. That is the closest example to what that sounded like. Despite utterly freaking me out, a part of it was almost hypnotic and I noticed my body getting closer to the door. I then felt a leathery hand on my shoulder and that snapped me out of my trance.

“What the hell is in there?” I questioned as I was still trembling.

“Don’t ask. Trust me when I say for your own sanity, do not attempt to enter that room.” He explained with the demeanor of someone who had just returned home from a massacre. His eyes were even thinner than before, sweat was pouring out from his scales, and he was shivering as if recalling a terrifying nightmare. Just then, a booming scream which sounded like someone getting brutally murdered pierced through the door and nearly destroyed my eardrums. I actually had to plug my ears and crouch to the ground to stop my head from exploding due to the shear intensity of those screams.

Apophis then grabbed my arm and rushed me away from that room. The two of us sprinted away and when we were far enough for those sounds to be mute, the two of us lurched forwards to catch our breathes.

“What the fuck man!?” I yelled while I was hyperventilating.

“I know.” He said shakily.

“What is in there?!” I questioned.

“Hell incarnate.” He said bluntly.

I was going to get up in his face and demand a straight answer but I could see that the noise was deeply disturbing him as well.

Eventually, the two of us made it to what looked like an office and at the desk was the man who brought me here. His attire was the same as when we first met other than the fact that this time he wasn’t wearing glasses. His eyes were a yellowish green color and looked normal unlike the reptilian looking eyes I could have sworn he had before.

“Ah, nice to see you again Mr. Petros.” He said like a secretary addressing a client.

I could only stand there as the noises were still echoing in my mind.

“Uh, what’s wrong with him?” He asked.

“The noises got to him Mr. S.” Apophis explained.

“Got it. Well Vlad, there is no need for unease now because we have Nina ready for a video conference with you.” He explained reassuringly.

I would have been extremely happy at that news but I still couldn’t get over the haunting noises I heard.

I was then guided to a room with a few desks and computers and sat down in a swivel chair.

I must have waited for another minute before I heard what sounded like a phone ringing and I looked at the computer which was displaying a video chat request. I accepted it and the second I saw Nina’s wide smile, I was completely out of my trance. Seeing her face once again filled me with more happiness than I’ve ever felt in my life. Not only did she look happy, but also clean, healthy, and most of all well taken care of.

“Good, they’re fulfilling their end of the deal.” I said to myself.

“Hey Nina! You look great!” I said now completely blocking out all the crap I have been suffering through. This was what I needed, an actual indicator of why I am enduring all of this.

“Hey Vlad, how is your job going?” She asks.

“Eh it’s not really a job but-“ I say before cutting myself off realizing that under no circumstances could she know that her seemingly luxurious new life is a reward for me enduring torture and experimentation.

“It’s complicated to explain but I’m managing.” I told her.

“That’s good.” She replied

“You look great.” I complimented.

“Thanks, they have been treating me like a princess. They give me the most delicious food, a sleep in a gigantic comfy bed, and the kids here are so nice!” She explained.

“Thank god.” I said under my breathe.

Eventually after a while of catching up and some pointless conversation, Mr. S came in the room and explained that my time is up.

With that news, I said my goodbyes to Nina and the call was soon disconnected.

“Thank you very much.” I said to Mr. S to which that creepy grin grows once more across his face.

“Don’t mention it. But remember, her treatment solely relies on your participation. Use it as motivation to continue working hard as a single misstep could spell disaster for the both of you. Have a nice day.” He said with a voice sharper than any blade and no emotion whatsoever. He just stood there still and stiff as a board and he honestly gave me the shivers.

Apophis then guided me out but I then heard Mr. S whistle and I saw him throw what looked like pebbles at us but Apophis was quick enough to catch them and Mr. S simply said “Good luck.”

Apophis opened his hand with whatever it was that Mr. S threw and they were ear plugs. I guess he didn’t want us to fixate on the noises anymore. The two of us placed them in our ears and eventually we made it back to the living quarters and he showed me to my room which now had a V carved into it.

“Just so you don’t enter the wrong persons room. Trust me it is not only awkward but dangerous.” He said to which I thanked him before entering my room to write all of this

down. So yeah, the day started out weird but now, I am full of hope, hope and determination. Mr. S's words still echoed in my head and after seeing how good Nina now has it, I am not going to threaten that happiness with my mistakes. With that sentence echoing in my mind, I started thinking of what my next move should be.

Now I am thinking about going back to the sparring facility. I honestly don't want to go internally but I have to be a model soldier now, for Nina's sake. I'll update ~~when I get back~~ If I get back.

Well, that was interesting. So when I got to the door I expected it to be locked this time but it wasn't so I entered and instantly I knew it wasn't going to be like the last time I was in here. When I pushed the door open, I saw Artaios being flung across the room and hitting the metal wall. Instantly, he got back up and rushed towards Ix and tackled her to the ground. She attempted to counter by slicing him with her blades but Artaios simply blocked the slashes with his metal arms. I backed away and accidentally hit the door indicating my presence to the two who instantly looked in my direction. They then looked at each other, and smiled before the echoed voice going through the monitors said, "Battle Royale."

The two got off each other after hearing this and we stood in a triangle at a fair distance between us and I knew what was going to happen next. I am the new guy and they want to gage how I compare to them. This won't be an everyone for themselves, it is going to be a two on one. I chose to make the first move and managed to use my blades to scale the wall by piercing through a thin layer of the metal barrier keeping us in this room. It was difficult to climb the wall using my blades, similar to rock climbing with small rocks to place your hands and feet on. Artaios tried to do the same but his weapons didn't go far enough into the wall for him to climb but that didn't stop him from trying in vein. Ix on the other hand pounced onto the wall

and scaled it at a much quicker pace than me and was getting closer. I was at first terrified and my heart started beating quicker making me think I was going to black out again but then I realized that it was actually adrenaline pumping through my veins. I was getting a thrill out of this somehow. Despite being the least experienced person in this room, I knew what these battles were about and knew that I simply have to rely on instinct for survival.

Ix was getting even closer to me and I had only seconds to react if I wanted to survive so I contorted my body to be positioned like I were about to push off the edge of a pool and begin swimming laps. Then I pushed my legs with an intense force and was sent flying. My body was facing the ceiling and I spun around so I would face the ground and then I felt something grab my shirt. It was Artaios's hand but I managed to spin around and aimed my blades for the areas of his arm not covered in metal before striking. I cut him in the bicep and he instantly lets go of me. I then use my legs to push off of him and I land without a hitch. I then look and see both Ix and Artaios running after me. Artaios is clutching his arm that I cut. The free spirited woman I had just met only hours ago now had a bloodthirsty expression to her face and her maroon eyes looked blood red, her movements were so quick that she was mostly a speeding blur but now was not the time for observation. Quickly I decided to charge at them as that would have been the most unpredictable move which thankfully did catch the two off guard. I used that confusion to my advantage and was able jump at Artaios and place him in a rear naked choke just like how Ix did and luckily this behemoth didn't react in time allowing me to incapacitate him. Right when I landed on the ground, Ix pounced at me and I didn't have enough time to dodge as she pierced my shoulders pinning me to the ground. I could see blood spurting out of the holes in my shoulders and I swear I could hear the metal scrape into my bone and the pain accompanying it was unreal. It was like nails on a chalkboard with physical pain instead of

auditory pain and if my bones were the chalkboard. The only experience more painful was having my blades attached to my arms, but that pain I doubt can ever be matched or exceeded. I shrieked in pain as she continued to dig her blades deeper into me and I managed to see her face and it looked primal, predatory, and animalistic. That was no person on top of me, no, it was a beast, a jaguar digging its claws into me. Summoning all my strength, I kicked upwards and managed to get her off me.

For some reason, she allowed me the time to get back up, maybe she still had some humanity or maybe she enjoyed toying with her prey but I didn't care. Getting up was not an easy task as I had no feeling in my arms now. They were utterly useless now other than inflicting me with intense pain. This meant that using them as support to get back up was out of the question. I flopped to my stomach and managed to scrape my bare feet across the sand until I locked my feet in a position that allowed me to stand back up. I looked down at my still bleeding wounds which now looked like bullet holes then back up to Ix who looked like she was about to continue her onslaught.

"Stop!" I yelled through my wheezes in pain.

"I surrender, you win!" I shouted at her.

"That's not how this works." The echo stated over the monitor, "There is no surrender, only victory and defeat."

"But I cannot fight! I am useless now!" I yelled at the ceiling but I got no answer.

Ix's expression then turned from a primal rage to one of sympathy.

She then reluctantly took on a fighting stance and I stood still as the sweat, blood, and sand continued to drip slowly off my body. That being said, I couldn't help but smile a little.

“If I can’t surrender, then I’ll go out on my own terms.” I said as I used each last ounce of strength I had left to raise my hands. They made a squelching noise as I moved them and the pain was nearly unbearable but my resolve was far too strong now. I powered through the pain and lifted my arms and crossed them in front of my chest.

Ix’s eyes went wide, she knew what I was planning.

I quickly uncrossed my arms and with that, I fell to my knees. Blood began to gradually pour out quicker as a large red X opened across my torso. She spent very little time where she was as she rushed over to me and applied pressure to my wound and then, I blacked out.

When I opened my eyes, I was back in the emergency room and I was covered in bandages and gauze, the majority of which was on my chest and shoulders. I must have been under some strong painkillers as my entire body was numb and all I could move was my head. I first looked down and thankfully, this time I had some pants on. I turned my head and saw Ix sleeping in a chair across the room with only a few bruises and bandages visible.

I decided to whistle in order to wake her up and when she did wake up, she immediately tensed up and looked ready to fight. After a bit, she seemed to calm down and noticed I was awake and began to approach me with a blank expression on her face.

“You got some balls man.” She said to which I chuckled. I mean seriously, I could have been in a critical condition and that’s the first thing she says to me. God this place is crazy.

“Thanks I guess.” I replied and what followed after that was nothing but awkward silence.

“Can I ask you something?” I asked to which she just shrugged.

Now I must have been under some serious drugs because looking back, what I said next was so rude and I should've gotten punched for it.

"What the hell is your problem, you and the bear? He is so intimidating but he acts like a child and you, what are you bipolar or something?" Yes, that's what I said.

She just glared at me with the most evil stare before turning her back to me.

"Not everyone can be lucky like you you know." She said before taking a deep breathe and continuing, "Most of us have seen some real horrible shit before we were recruited for this, Artaios and I especially. Some, if not all recruits enter this place with scars and bruises but there are some who have seen some real shit that seriously fucked us up. You think there's something wrong with us, oh you have NO idea. Try having your platoon slaughtered in front of you while you're left helpless. Try experiencing this and then try to remain mentally stable." She said in a saddened tone. "Artaios took to joking around in order to relieve himself from his intense pain. I on the other hand drive myself to become stronger in hopes that I will never become helpless again. This goal allows me to sleep at night knowing that while I couldn't do anything back then, I will have no trouble fighting now. But this drive causes me to lose touch with reality and I often display the wrong emotions as inside I am still broken."

I actually started to cry at that as I had no idea of what hell they had to go through. In all honesty I thought they were just offered this because they were great soldiers; however, it is obvious that they were recruited because they had no other option as without this, they wouldn't be able to survive in the world anymore.

"I am so sorry." I said with complete honesty and regret in my voice for asking that stupid question.

She then turned back to face me with tears in her eyes and a broken expression which I know all too well.

“Just think next time.” She said while wiping her tears and soon, she was back to her badass self. The transition between moods was actually visible as her body twitched and instantly, her expression was different.

“Better watch yourself because next time self sacrifice won’t be an option.” She said with a smirk.

“That goes both ways you know.” I reply with a smug look on my face and she just leaves the room laughing. I then hear her say from outside the room, “He’s awake.” Before footsteps get rhythmically closer to the door and instead of the doctor, the sadistic bastard walked in. He was smiling like always and when he was right next to me, I cursed myself for injuring myself this much as I cannot attempt to defend myself or even struggle against what this fuck had in store for me.

“You never fail to impress me Vlad.” He said with giddy in his voice.

“What the fuck? This asshole is complimenting me now?” I thought.

“Never in this operation’s history has someone chose self destruction to end a fight. You are either very bold or very stupid.” He said before laughing.

God I want to punch him. Every word out of his mouth is like poison. I’ll go mad If I have to keep hearing him talk.

“What, nothing to say, no threats or attempts to escape?” He said mocking the fact that I was trapped in place.

“Well, either way, you did some serious damage to your body in addition to the nerve damage inflicted on your shoulders. You should count yourself lucky that we have the

means to heal you. Anywhere else and the only thing that'll help would be a bullet." He explained to which I just rolled my eyes in contempt. He then placed wires on my bandages and took out a large wooden spoon.

"You're gonna wanna bite down on this." He said as if he was given orders he'd rather not fulfill. I guess humility really does go against his questionable morals. Reluctantly I did bite down and he flipped a switch causing volts of electricity to enter through my bandages and into my body. In all honesty the pain was more a kin to being burned alive rather than electrocution. But either way, it was unpleasant and the sick fuck was enjoying every moment of my agony. I thought I was going to snap the spoon in half but it didn't and surprisingly, the spoon actually did help me manage my pain. I then looked down at my body and through my shakes of pain, I could see red coat my bandages and then that red turned orange. Well, at least it looked orange but I could have just hallucinated that part.

After a while of this, he flipped the switch off and the electricity stopped entering my body. After my body stopped shaking, I actually felt some liquid enter through the cuts, a liquid a little thicker than blood but I was not about to check what was placed inside me through my electroshock therapy.

"The volts were super concentrated which helped with re-stimulating your damaged nerves while a healing agent which was coated in your bandages entered your system. You will be healed within two hours." He said with a little trace of annoyance in his voice like he was unhappy by the fact that he is done with my torture.

"Where is the doctor at?" I asked to which he gave me a confused expression before realizing what I meant and responding with, "He's preoccupied at the moment."

He then said, “When you’re all healed up, the bandages will fall off and then you can leave.” Before leaving himself.

An unknown amount of time passed and the bandages dissolved from the center and then fell off like a cast. Slowly and methodically, I left the room and decided to head back to my living quarters. Despite not exactly knowing which direction it was in, I simply chose a direction, walked, and eventually, I did in fact make it to the hallway containing the living quarters. When I got back into my room, I noticed that a new uniform was on my bed, pants included. Then I saw, tucked into a dark corner of the room, a small box television with a vcr port. There was a note on it saying “Play me.”

I did just that and in black and white, I saw my battle with Ix and Artaios. The way we each moved without thought and instead with pure instinct was a sight to behold, we were each fighting like animals; however, there was a kind of beauty to it. When the video ended, I searched the room for my notebook and began writing everything that had happened since I left for the training room.

I finished my writing and decided to lay down as my body was still sore from the entire ordeal but that was disrupted by heavy banging on my door. I changed into my newer uniform and opened the door. I was expecting someone to administer my injection for the day but instead, Artaios stood in front of me all high and mighty. I instinctively took a step back as I noticed that his expression was completely blank instead of the joyous face from the last time we interacted.

“Did Ix rat me out on what I said?” I thought with terror coursing through me.

“Come with me.” He said in a no nonsense voice while gesturing with his hand for me to follow.

Not knowing how to respond, I complied with his request and followed him to the hall facing towards the training center.

“Shit!” I thought as fear permeated my soul. But luckily for me, he turned to face opposite of the large doors, fidgeted his fingers on the wall, and out of nowhere, the wall opened up to reveal a small bar. Seeing that, I breathed a sigh of relief until I saw Ix glaring at me from the bar counter. That look confused me as it appeared as if she were contemplating on whether to be happy that I healed so quickly or whether she wanted to punch me in the face. She is still caught on the insensitive question I asked. I then look at Artaios who was now smiling like an idiot. Not an insult, its genuinely what it looked like. He then guided me to the counter and asked the guy behind the counter for three shots of Jaeger.

“Wait? We can drink?” I asked confusedly.

“Only on special occasions.” Ix explained.

“They won’t allow us to get too drunk but they will give us the chance to numb the pain.” Artaios said while pointing at cameras.

“What’s the occasion?” I asked.

“Battle.” Artaios said happily while banging his hands on the counter.

Shortly after this explanation, the bartender came out from behind the bar carrying three shots of Jaeger, and placing them in front of us. Ix slid her shot over to me and said “Not a Jaeger person.” before ordering a few shots of something called “Arak”. Then I ordered some shots of vodka as I wasn’t really in the mood for Jaegermeister. I pushed Ix’s Jaeger shot to Artaios. Soon I was given two shots of vodka and Ix got her drink. To be honest the vodka wasn’t that strong so I turned to Ix and asked her if we could trade one for the other.

She simply smiled and chuckled before asking in a mocking tone “You sure you can handle it?” I then swapped our shots and downed it in one gulp and refusing to chase it. Instantly I am covered in goosebumps and am shivering. That drink was strong and had a kick to it. She simply laughed and pointed at my shaking self before taking some sips of my vodka. It was then that I saw her uniform and realized where she was from, she’s an Israelite.

Artaios ordered another two shots of Jaeger and I tried ordering some more vodka but was only given one more while the others were able to order two more.

“What the hell?” I asked.

“You’ve already had three and the limit is four. We’ve only had two.” Ix explains.

“That’s some serious BS.” I stated.

Then I feel a sharp stinging in my neck and each of us flinch and shout in pain in unison. We each turn around and see the asshole holding a blowdart gun.

“Seriously?!” I yelled.

He just smiled and walked out of the bar. I wanted to chase after him but I’m sure the seats were rigged with restraints.

“I hate that guy.” Ix said, now pissed off and she actually breaks her glass but it doesn’t seem like it affected her at all.

“Nah he’s fine.” Artaios said.

The two of us then give him a confused look as there was no way he could be serious.

“He’s just doing his job.” Artaios continued.

“Personally, I hate that sadistic fuck.” I said.

“You took the words right out of my mouth.” Ix agreed.

Despite the tension caused by that bastard, the drinks definitely eased some of the tension and I felt better around Ix and Artaios. It wasn't long afterwards when we finished our drinks and pulled out the small darts in our necks before starting to leave. The bartender then gave each of us a bag of pretzels when we got to the door. We left the bar and made our way to our rooms.

"Sorry again for what I said before Ix." I told her.

She simply nodded and began to grow a small smile before continuing her walk to her room.

We made it to the hallway where our rooms were located in and they waved me off when I got in my room.

When I got into my room, I resumed writing this crapfest that is my life but luckily, I know that this place won't be that bad if there are people in similar boats to myself. This fact definitely made the day seem a little better and restored my ability to be hopeful.

The nightmare begins

Ok, well that was fucked. I am rushing to get all of this down as I don't want to forget any details I just saw but oh man that experience was fucked.

So I was sleeping and I heard the wailing and screams from the vault echoing in my room. Those same monstrous yet almost human shrieks pierced my ears and for some reason, my body started to act on its own. I bursted out of my room only wearing my pants and rushed to the vault. Strangely the voices were stronger in my room rather than where the vault is but I

didn't care. My body was acting on its own and I somehow managed to get that door open. On the other side of the room was not a prison but a laboratory. Picture Dr. Frankenstein's lab but modern, that's what this looked like. Chemicals, tubes, and strange machinery surrounded me. Now I didn't want to be here but I couldn't stop myself from proceeding. I went down a hallway and was brought to a fork and for some reason, I knew to turn left. I was walking when out of nowhere the shrieks burst out even louder and nearly deafened me. It brought me to the ground and I made a terrifying realization, these screams, these chilling shrieks of obvious inhuman origin were screaming words.

“Stop!!!!!!Stop!!!!!!” Those were the words piercing my ears. Once I realized that, the monstrous sounds faded into the screams of human pain. Like an animal or monster that's vocal cords are all wrong but is still attempting to use human speech. Then I saw a flash of light and an intense weight befell me and I couldn't move. It was like I was magnetized to the floor and surrounded by intense white light. I then received these static flashes in my mind followed by extremely loud white noise. It was like I was being used as a transmitter and the signal was too weak.

Then the images came. I saw a man, tall and stoic. He was smiling but then more images came. He was pushed into a thin tube-like prison and all his appendages were locked in place. Then he was repeatedly experimented on: forced blood extraction, blood transfusions, blood infusions, forced starvation, and hundreds of injections. Then I saw flashes of still images of his body changing. As the scars appeared, so did the mutations: his hair and skin began turning ghostly white, huge veins appeared all over his face, gills appeared on his neck, and then something started growing on this mans sides from beneath the skin. Then the experiments continued getting even more graphic and savage.

Someones life was flashing through my eyes through what appeared like still images going through a slideshow. Then the images went by at a much quicker pace getting nauseatingly fast and then it stopped at a close up of the mans eye. It was a piercing and haunting shade of green with enormous bags beneath it like he's been sleep deprived for weeks. Then the image got closer and I saw his pupil split and squirm around his iris until his eye looked like a four way pie chart with squiggly black lines. This image was so haunting. This entire experience was so haunting that I couldn't stop myself from puking. I emptied my guts until there was nothing left inside me and my throat felt like it was being stabbed with a sword. My eyes were stinging with tears and once again, my body took on a mind of its own and forced me to return to my room. The second I shut my door, I collapsed to my knees in terror and all I could think of was write this down.

I have no idea on what just happened to me but that face I saw is burned into my mind.

I cannot sleep now, not with that face appearing every time I close my eyes, I'll have to stay awake.

Update: I am fucked, alarms are starting to blare and I hear people leaving their rooms. Did they find out that someone entered the vault, was I caught on camera. Oh God, I threw up in there. What's going to happen. I have to hide this book and try to act normal if that is the reason why the alarms are going off.

Okay so I just got back to my room and let me tell you that what I just went through was terrifying. So after hiding this notebook, I left my room and followed a group of people down the hall to the training area. We entered and instead of the sandy environment, it

looked like an auditorium and other than myself, there had to be like twenty other people inside. We all sat down in chairs and I realized that each of them had some sort of metal attached to their bodies. They were all chimeras like me but I refused to look at their particular mutations as I have seen enough of that for a lifetime with what just happened. Within seconds of everyone sitting down, the asshole took center stage and for once, he wasn't smiling. He looked very angry which instantly made the room feel like a frozen wasteland.

“So one of you finally did it!” He snarled. The room was then full of whispers and then he shouted “One of you broke into the vault!”

And with that, the room fell silent.

“Now I don't think I need to remind any of you how that room is off limits to everyone! Only I am allowed in there! After what happened last time I thought you would all be smart enough to listen but one of you was stupid enough to enter the vault and make contact!” He yelled.

I see the guy next to me start trembling in horror and then I see his face. His face is completely disfigured and is covered completely in burns. Only his left hand is free from marks but his right hand is obviously gone and all there was a giant crab claw instead of a forearm. It started at his elbow and extended upwards to form a claw blade but it was obvious that there was no flesh or bone beneath it.

“That room is off limits for a reason. Access to the vault isn't allowed for your own sanity and the fact that one of you entered is beyond infuriating. Now whichever one of you assholes who decided to make contact will eventually be found. You may think that you can get away with this injustice but I'm sure everyone knows that contact changes people and when

those changes become obvious, the consequences you will receive will be at the upmost severity.” He angrily explains.

“Wait, don’t you have cameras?” I stupidly blurt out and the bastard stares directly at me.

“Ah Mr. Petros. Yes we do; however, each time the vault opens, the cameras get fried.” He said through gritted teeth.

This was the first time that this man intimidated me enough to sink into my chair in fear rather than making me want to punch him.

“Dismissed!” He growls at us and instantly we all get up and leave.

Seriously, I just dodged a bullet by not getting immediately found out, but now I have another much bigger problem. The problem of retaining false innocence and what that will mean for Nina and I. After all, he explained that those who come into contact with whatever was in there changes people. The fact that he didn’t explain what kind of change be it physical or psychological worried me. I now realize that writing this all down will definitely screw me over if they search this book but I cannot help myself as writing is now the only thing which gives me any form of comfort.

Okay, so I came up with a few ideas to help prolong my false innocence, the first being that I will have to rip out these pages and hide them, well. I am thinking of the air vent in my room and for good measure, I am also going to make the pages illegible for everyone who stares at them. Well, all except for me. The next idea will be my safeguard if the change is in fact psychological as all I need to do is blame that on the fact that I am still fairly new here and for all I know, about to mutate. If it’s a physical change, I will have to blame it on the fact that I am going through my mutation.

Despite thinking long and hard and realizing that these are my only options lest I want to be found out, I still feel deep down that it won't be enough and Nina will pay the price for my misdeed. This caused my heart to once more kick into overdrive and beat rapidly. Next I felt a pit in my stomach and I started to sweat. I have to be strong and avoid suspicion, for Nina's sake. The idea of causing Nina pain because of something I did, that alone filled me with more terror and dread than anything else I have experienced here. I would gladly see that things face a million more times, or be forcibly paralyzed/sedated and have gruesome experiments performed on me if it meant that Nina was both safe and that I could continue living my life knowing that I had not ruined hers.

Hopefully I will be able to rewrite this someday but for now, let's hope I don't get caught.

The Change

It's starting. For all I know, only a week has passed since I entered this place and it is already starting. I woke up today and I immediately knew something was wrong. Call it self awareness or intuition I don't really know or care, all I can say for certain is something is fundamentally different about myself and I just feel wrong. Imagine waking up after a night of heavy drinking and despite having little knowledge of the events, you can tell something happened to you and not something good. All of a sudden, I break out in goosebumps and feel very dizzy. In fact, I feel like my head was about to either explode or fall off. I got up and immediately, I am overwhelmed by an intense internal feeling, I felt like absolute death at that moment. Then my eyesight goes blurry before I receive an intense shooting and stinging pain

coming from them. You ever have a headache that you feel specifically through your own eyes, that inescapable pain that just won't leave until a significant time passes by? This was worse. I literally had to force my palms into my eyelids in order to numb some of the pain. I was careful when doing so however as I did not want to accidentally slice up my face. Something was definitely wrong with me and it wasn't sickness. "I need to get to that emergency room quickly." Was all I could think at that moment. With my hands currently inaccessible at the moment, I had to rely on my elbows to direct me to both my door handle and later the emergency room. I had a general idea of where I was going but every movement I was making was agonizing. My body wasn't going to last for much longer and I knew it. My elbow was scraping against the wall as I continued to go against my body's wishes in pressing onwards. I was hoping that I could continue to be strong just long enough for me to reach the emergency room.

I lasted at most a minute before my body collapsed onto the ground. I had to quickly move my hands from my face as I fell because of my blades and I was luckily able to do so. I hit the ground hard and couldn't move. My eyes were in agony, my body was in agony, and to top it all off, I was basically paralyzed while face down on the floor. Was that it? No. In fact, the sadistic God that reigns supreme over this world saw it fitting for me to also start involuntarily shaking like I was having a seizure and then I puked up bile.

"Why oh Why!!!???" I screamed out internally as my mouth completely lost its ability to function. "Is this punishment? No, it can't be that. I hope." I then thought.

Thankfully, after being sprawled out on the floor for maybe three minutes, luck finally shined down on me. I was loosing faith that I would get help in time before succumbing to whatever was happening to me when I heard "Oh shit!" In a frantic worried voice. The voice

sounded familiar but I couldn't make it out. I then hear the same frantic voice yell, "Akheilos, help me get him up!"

I then felt my body being lifted up by two hands, both of which had the texture of sandpaper. My arms were then placed around the shoulders of these two individuals. They then started carrying me forwards. Eventually, I hear loud and rapid knocking on a door before hearing the squeak of it opening. "Doc, we need your help!" One of them said with panic in his voice.

"Bring him in." I hear the doctor say quickly.

The two carrying me quickly bring me into the room before I hear "Put him down here." To which they comply and slowly set me down on a bed. Right when I was placed down, my body resumed its trembling and for a moment, I regained the ability to move as I lurched forwards to puke out more bile before returning to my paralyzed state.

"Vlad! Can you hear me?" The doctor asked.

I somehow managed to regain some functionality in my mouth and managed to open it. Opening it felt similar to opening your mouth when hard candy basically glues your teeth together when biting down. After I somehow managed to get my mouth opened, I could only plead in a hoarse voice, "Help."

He then proceeded to feel my pulse and then paused, hand still on my arm until he bolts away from the table and runs back, placing an oxygen tank over my nose and mouth. He then began pumping oxygen and that relieved a little pain and stopped my body from its state of perpetual trembling. I then feel a sharp object enter into my arm which honestly made me woozy. Soon, I was drifting in and out of consciousness until I was out cold.

What I saw next was a dark room. There were no walls, nor was there a floor or ceiling. It was void of everything and yet, I could feel a presence. I was floating around and eventually saw a figure coaxed down and sitting on his tiptoes. The figure was extremely pale and barely anything but skin and bone. That was when I remembered the dream. This is the me I am afraid I'll become. The version of me who killed Nina in my nightmare. The second I made that realization, my other self started to turn around slowly and the two of us locked eyes. This thing's eye had no trace of humanity left in them. They were the eyes of a feral beast, a monster, and they were staring right at me. Then, in one swift motion, this monster gets up and simultaneously extends a clawed hand at me before slashing me. The shock from that strike was actually enough to wake me up but the second my eyes opened, the pain returned.

While they were opened however, I was able to catch a glimpse of the doctor, the asshole, and the smart-ass who gave me my pills. They were all standing in front of my bed arguing with each other and I doubt they even saw that I was awake.

I then heard the doctor say in a demanding tone, "I'll ask you one more time. How many injections did you give him." I don't know how but for some reason, I could actually hear the asshole's mouth widen into a malicious grin. It sounded like a very faint stretching noise but I just knew it was coming from the bastard's mouth and what it looked like. It was as if the surrounding noises were intensified and more detailed and they were painting a picture of what was around me to make up for my lack of sight.

The stretching sound stops and everything is so detailed that I can essentially see the asshole's face perfectly as well as his malicious grin. It looked, well at least to me, like he had been waiting for someone to catch him, like it was some sort of sick game where the

objective was to see how many injections he could get away with administering before getting caught.

“I fucking told you-“ The doctor started to shout before getting cut off by the bastard, “You have no authority on the matter Kelly. The higher ups placed me in charge remember?”

I could literally hear the doctor wind up to punch the bastard, but smart-ass doctor stepped in blocking the punch, I even heard the clap of the fist being blocked which confirmed that I was seeing with my ears.

Slowly, the feeling in my body returned to normal and I was able to move little by little, but my eyes still stung like hell even when they were shut so they remained closed. I was trying to lift my hands which felt like they were held down by weights when out of nowhere, that resistance vanished and my arms just shot upwards which got the attention of the three in front of me.

“Oh, so you’re awake.” The asshole said joyously and I could hear him slowly turn his head in a lower left direction presumably to scare me before realizing that my eyes were closed shut. “How much of that did you hear?” He asked in a deranged tone.

I could see through my ears that he was approaching me until the smart ass doctor clamped his hand on the bastards shoulder and told him to stop in a calm and collected voice. For some reason the bastard listened and left the room but not before saying “You really need to watch yourself **Eren**, I like you but that can all change if you continually go against me.” I could hear **Eren** roll his eyes.

The doctor then asked, “Vlad, what happened?”

“I..I honestly don’t know. I woke up and something just felt wrong. Then my vision became blurred and my eyes began hurting incredibly. Everything else started hurting soon after and all I could do was attempt to make my way here.” I answered.

“You sure you aren’t just very dehydrated?” **Eren** asked in his snarky overly superior sounding voice.

“Shut up **Eren**.” The doctor said in an annoyed tone.

“Fine.” **Eren** groaned before patting down his lab coat as if he was looking for something. “Crap! I misplaced my notepad.” He said in annoyance.

“Seriously?” The doctor asked baffled.

“Uhm, is that it on the desk chair?” I asked while pointing in the direction of where my ears showed me as being the desk.

The two of them went silent and looked at me confusedly. Then **Eren** slowly walked to the desk chair and lifted up his notepad in shock.

“How did you know?” The doctor asked in shock.

“I...Can hear my surroundings and was painted a picture of the room.” I said slowly as I just now realized how impossible and fantastical it was.

The two doctors were just standing there in place eyes wide and mouths agape just staring at me in wonder.

“You...You can see the the room through your auditory senses?” The doctor asked.

“I think so.” I responded.

“Kelly, cover his eyes I need to try something.” **Eren** said.

I then felt the rough surface of the doctor’s glove cover my face.

“Alright Vlad, how many fingers am I holding up?” **Eren** inquired, and if my eyes weren’t closed, they would be rolling.

I was annoyed that he thought this was an appropriate time to joke but I simply complied and answered the question, “Three but technically they’re facing downwards.” I said.

“Okay, what am I doing now?” He asked.

“Playing air guitar like a dumbass.” I respond still annoyed but this was somehow distracting me from my stinging eye pains.

I could sense his mouth drop at that response and the doctor then asked “Vlad, what is the sticker on my computer on the desk of?”

I concentrated and responded, “A katana.”

“Ugh Vlad.” The doctor said both astounded and like he needed to tell me something.

“Yes?” I asked.

“You’re clicking your tongue.” He said.

“I’m doing what?” I asked confusedly as one, I didn’t feel myself clicking my tongue, and two, what does that have to do with anything?

“Well, that just about confirms it.” **Eren** responds holding in his excitement.

“CONFIRMS WHAT!?” I asked now scared.

“You are not sick, nor are you simply listening to your surroundings in order to get a visual on the room.” The doctor chimed in.

“You are using echolocation and advanced hearing to replace your eyes.” **Eren** said a huge smile across his face.

“We honestly didn’t think it would happen so quickly.” The doctor said in amazement.

“HOW AM I ECHOLOCATING!!??” I shriek as that is an ability that no human should have. Plus the fact that echolocation did actually make some sense in explaining this only made me confused and terrified.

“Your process is beginning at a hyper-accelerated rate. I mean we theorized that it was possible but the fact that it actually happened is nothing short of incredible.” **Eren** said with such joy that you would have thought he just cured cancer.

It was just then that I remembered why exactly I was here and the fact that I had been receiving multiple injections of animal DNA. That fact lessened the complete paralysis inducing information on what I am now able to do. It still scared me but less now that I remembered why it was happening. “It was only a matter of time.” I thought.

Then a question popped into my head, one that I needed an answer to right away.

“Doctor, what animal DNA have you been injecting me with.” I asked nervously.

I was able to tell from my apparent echolocating ability as well as my super hearing that they were a bit nervous to answer, it was plastered on their faces, but they eventually nodded at each other and the doctor finally spoke up.

“You were injected with a multitude of bat DNA.” The doctor said.

“Bats? Bats? Are you serious?” I asked hysterically.

“Yes, and with how quickly your body adapted to the process in such a short amount of time, the other superpowers you can gain are many.” **Eren** excitedly responds.

“You are turning me into a vampire.” I said with absolute fear in my voice as the tears started flowing.

“No shit Sherlock.” **Eren** slyly said.

“Shut it. Look, Vlad, you are not a vampire. You are not going to burn away into nothingness if exposed to sunlight, you are not going to develop a deadly allergy to garlic-“ The doctor explained before **Eren** cut him off by saying “He will probably die if stabbed in the heart with a wooden stake.” Before falling to the ground laughing.

“**Eren!** Not the time!” The doctor yelled before continuing, “Now, as I was saying, garlic and sunlight won’t harm you, and you most certainly won’t receive a craving for blood. All we did was imbue you with the abilities of certain bats. There is no way of us predicting which abilities you gain or are currently gaining but I promise you that at the end of the day, you will still be Vladimir Petros.”

This honestly lightened the blow more and made me actually feel better but it still left me with the fear of what other abilities I’ll obtain. After all, I don’t even know most of the abilities of a bat besides flight and echolocation.

“So, I guess this is the part where I receive my obvious code name.” I said.

“Well it’s not really a code name for you as you share the same first name with what we picked. But hey, that just means you don’t have to adjust to a new name.” The doctor said calmly.

“Wait, so I am not going to be addressed as Dracula?” I half joked.

“Not unless you want to. You can go as Vlad, Dracula, or Vlad Dracula respectively.” He said. I smiled at that for some unknown reason before the pain in my eyes grew causing me to tighten my grip on my eyelids.

“Is this pain related to my powers?” I asked through gritted teeth.

“Possibly. It’s honestly too early to tell but if I were to guess, this rapid change in senses caused a displacement of some sort resulting in your eyes being more sensitive to light.”

Eren explained.

“So what does this mean? Will my eyes always be this painful?” I asked.

“From what we saw while you were unconscious, your eyes just need time to adjust with this change. Best case scenario, it goes away with time. Worst case, you have a sensitivity to light which can be corrected through special contacts or surgery. For now, I’ll just give you some medication for the pain.”

“Why didn’t you give me those in the first place?” I asked frustratedly.

“All we knew were that your eyes were glossier than they should have been.

There is no way we could’ve known that they were hurting you.” **Eren** explained.

Soon, **Eren** left the room for a small amount of time and came back with a cup of water and three pills.

“Two of these are for the pain while the other is a stronger heart medication. We want to be safe and considering your current situation, your heart is already under more strain than it can handle.”

I took the pills, placed them in my mouth, and drank the water.

“I know we just told you some pretty unbelievable and terrifying things and you probably have a lot of questions but you really need some rest. Your body and mind are under tremendous stress right now and it will only bring pain for you while you’re still awake, despite taking the pain meds.” The doctor explained.

“Wait, can you at least do me one favor before I sleep?” I asked.

“Sure.” He responded.

“Can you grab my notebook from my room and allow me to recite to you the events of the day?” I asked.

“It’s an odd request but in all honesty I have nothing better to do since no one has entered the training room yet.” The doctor responded.

Yes, this isn’t Vlad writing but the doctor instead. I wrote down his account of the day basically the same way he worded it and aided him in recalling the conversations we had. I also wrote down that killer opening to start the this chapter of his life. Now you may be wondering why I’m not using my actual name when my last name had been stated twice. Well, the answer is I like being called the doctor, I think it’s cool.

Death

It is amazing how I am still alive after all of this. It has been just over three weeks since I had first arrived at this asylum and I have been tortured, manipulated, mutated, forced to fight, and hospitalized numerous times. The once driven man that I once was is almost certainly dead and I am not far behind. I hat to say it but this place is changing me, not only physically but also mentally. I am now a broken shell of my former self and am very close to surrendering in this fight for my life. It’s actually funny, I first was afraid of the battles I was thrown into, but now those are the only thing I look forward for. This is a sick, sadistic, and barbaric prison and as the days pass, the line separating my sanity from insanity grows ever thinner.

“I may be going insane.” I tell myself, only to then ask “But what if I’m already there?”

The changes aren’t stopping either and the only think that has improved in all honesty has been my eyes. I can once again see without experiencing unbearable pain, but with

that said, I have developed a slight sensitivity to light to where I can barely look at the pure white walls without getting a minor headache. That isn't the only change involving my eyes as my pupils now resemble long strait lines instead of orbs, my scleras are cloudy, and the color of my eyes is now a much lighter shade of brown than what it once was.

Aside from my eyes, there are currently only two other physical changes to my body. The first is that my skin is getting paler to the point where it looks like I'm perpetually sick. The other is that recently I have been able to sense approaching heat signatures. It is not necessarily infrared vision as all I am able to do is detect or more accurately sense someones body heat, however, this power only occurs when I intensionally want to, like a flick of a switch.

I have grown so accustomed to the insanity that consumes me on a now day to day basis, that only one thing that can now stimulate anything in my body, a single feeling that lets me know that I am still alive despite how dead I feel, that thing is pain. The unimaginable torture I endure on a daily basis is the one thing I can use to verify that I am still here. Ever since I began transforming, it feels like each day I tread further and further from my humanity and simultaneously lose a part of myself. I am incomplete and unable to muster any motivation or hope. Those feelings are merely distant memories from my past. I count the days by the number of food trays that enter my room but I cannot even feel the motivation to eat. I eat only what's necessary to sustain myself but I rarely finish a tray. To describe myself now would be little more than describing a walking corpse, all I do is move around without emotion or motivation. My life is nothing but pain and torture now and in my few moments of clarity, I think of Nina.

"Remember, you're doing this for her." I try to reassure myself but now, even this doesn't completely fix the emptiness I feel. Using Nina as my light can only last me for so long and now I fear that my pain may soon become my main motivator for getting out of bed. Despite

this, I will still fight for her, will still survive for her, but that's all I'm doing, surviving instead of actually living. I fight, I endure, and I survive only to watch the cycle repeat again and again.

I have actually began to entertain the thought of ending it. Ending this story and putting an end to my misery. I just want it to end but each time the thought pops in my head, I ultimately decide against it. If I were to die, I ~~want it~~ need it to have some essence of honorability rather than it be an action of self weakness and cowardice. This is another reason for why I continue to fight.

You may wonder why I am writing now, weeks after my last entry, or question why I am even writing something so dark. It is simple, I wanted to finally lay my demons to rest. I am about to go back to the training room and want to at least place a proper end to my story, an official conclusion to this book and therefore my life. I may survive but that luck is sure to run out eventually, but I refuse to go down without a fight.

Well, today was definitely different. Don't get me wrong, I still had a rough day and my emptiness is still present inside of me. But there is something different now, I actually feel better in a way.

Let me start from the beginning, so after I wrote that morbid insight into the hell that is my life, I headed towards the doors. I hesitated for a short while before entering inside. I couldn't help myself but look at those magnificently giant doors.

"For weeks, these doors provided an entryway to nothing but pain. But now they may provide the cure for my suffering, whether these doors become my personal gate to heaven or hell is up to chance but if it is my fate to die, I will not question it." This is what ran through

my mind before I pushed those doors open and out of all the times I entered that area, this was only the third time where I was the first person to enter the training facility.

Soon, I jumped up to the top of one of the walls (Side-note, ever since the second week, my reflexes and jumping capabilities have drastically improved) I then perched myself on top of said wall and waited, I waited and waited but no one came. An hour must have passed and I was getting bored and restless and was about to leave when the door opened quickly. I then see a hooded figure enter in hastily, fists clenched, head down, and I could tell she was angry. Now, from my current experience with using my multiple powers involving sight, I could hear the small facial movements she was making and man was she pissed. I also used my echolocation to paint a decent enough picture of her general figure. I have never seen her before and the second the door slammed shut, I was on edge, the air became electric and something about her just seemed wrong. Although I couldn't determine why, something told me to keep my guard up which actually caused me to become slightly afraid. But that fear was a welcoming for me as it reminded me of what I once was before I began turning into a monster. I then opened my eyes after I heard a strange buzzing coming from her hands. Not like a bee's buzzing but more like the buzzing a light bulb makes before it blows out. The strange buzzing, the obvious feeling of electricity in the air, she was causing all of it. I guess it's not that surprising, after all, Apophis can infect his opponents with venom so who's to say someone cannot use electricity like an electric eel.

"This is going to be fun." I said to myself as I realized that my heart was actually thumping at an accelerated rate. Just the anticipation alone was enough to reawaken some fragment of my soul. I actually felt a smile start to grow across my face.

“I know you’re already here. Let’s just get this over with already.” She said in annoyance as she searched the room for exactly where I was.

Not being one to disappoint, I dropped down from my position, using my blades to scrape against the wall so I would remain balanced in my fall. I hit the ground and as I approached her, I began to crack my neck and knuckles before stopping just five feet in front of her.

“I’m ready when you are.” I said.

She simply extended her hands out so they weren’t being covered by her cloak revealing metallic gloves with what looked like tubes which connected it to her flesh. She then bowed and I nervously smirked as I both her weapon and personality were unlike anyone I have fought in this prison before. Then, she removed her black cloak revealing her face. I was definitely not expecting to see what I saw next, her face was covered in scars. It looked like she had worn a humongous jellyfish as a mask only to be stung. That being said, her face was nowhere near disfigured, if anything she was beautiful. Very beautiful actually and It was easy for me to look past her scars.

“Are we going to fight or are you just going to stare at my face?” She asked in a pissed off tone as if I touched a nerve.

“Sorry.” I replied before entering my stance. Quickly, the tide turned from sizing up each other to going on the offensive.

Throughout the past few weeks, I have determined that I deal the most damage when my attacks are swift and constant and achieve such attacks through jumping off the walls and gliding through the air. It is like I am flying when I attack like this.

The second the battle begins, my happy anticipation seemed to vanish and my heart rate returned to its normal, barely beating rhythm.

“This is just going to be like all the other battles.” I told myself. I didn’t want to listen to that as I wanted to rekindle more sparks of life through battling this person, but deep down, I felt like my emptiness is not going away anytime soon.

I started running for the wall in an attempt to begin my attack. She may be beautiful but this is not a fight where one can simply hold back.

Right before I jumped onto the wall in order to kick off and launch myself into the air, I used my enhanced hearing to detect her position but to my confusion, she remained in same place she started.

“Does she doubt my abilities?!” I angrily yelled internally as I kicked my legs outwards to propel myself in her direction. I was like a torpedo hurling towards her gaining in speed and ready to land the first blow. She didn’t move though, there were zero attempts to get out of my way and if anything, she looked bored. This pissed me off even more but luckily, I was just seconds from making contact with her. That was when time seemed to slow down to a snail’s pace, I could hear her fingers twitch followed by a more intense electrical buzzing.

“Shit! This was a trap!” I shrieked in my head. She was planning for this, for me to attempt to make my first move only to be countered with her electricity. Whoever she is, she is a tactical genius.

Not planning to be caught in this trap, I thought quickly and what I ended up doing was spinning in midair and hoping that one of my blades hits the sandy ground diverting my flight path. Somehow, this works but I do end up taking a tumble and end up scratching my

bicep with one of my blades. It wasn't deep but it stung none the less. She then turned to face me with a shocked expression, she was not expecting that.

"I am not that dumb. You cannot rely on cheap shots like that to beat me." I taunted.

"But how?" She asked dumbfounded.

"I have superhuman hearing. Your motions were predictable through the minor sounds your body was making." I replied as my smile returned. This battle just started and already is getting interesting. As if she were thinking the same thing, she smiled as well before propelling herself forwards. She started running over towards me and in almost a single fluid motion, she crossed her arms across her chest, only to immediately extend them backwards and as she did this, sparks of electricity began to release out of her gloves.

She went on the offensive, good, this was perfect for challenging my reflexes. She started throwing fast punches aimed for my face and chest. Each hit left behind small yellow and blue afterimages caused by her electricity. Each punch she threw were fast but I was faster, managing to dodge each one. She then got angry and desperate now that both of her plans have failed and her punches went from an organized assault to a flurry of glowing punches coming from each direction. It became too much to handle and eventually, I got hit on the left side of my waist. It felt like something bit into my flesh. That pain caused me to lose focus allowing her to hit me in my right shoulder and in the ribs. I was nearing a wall and losing ground quickly and as the pain grew, my speed shrunk. Plus even if I didn't get hit, I couldn't simply keep avoiding her attacks. I had to counter and quickly.

I then got the bright idea and waited for her to bring her arm back in order to throw another punch as that was the only moment where I could strike. As she brought her arms

back, I quickly extended my left foot outwards and kicked up a heap of sand. It landed right in her face giving me enough time to jump onto the wall. Whenever I fight my mind can be erratic but my attacks will leave their marks, almost as if my mind and body separate as I battle. I think that is why I was able to quickly come up with strategies to avoid her electrically charged attacks. I landed on the top of the wall and after a second to think, I realized that my blood was now pumping again and my thrill has returned. This thrill was so powerful that I could barely even feel those stings from her attacks anymore. I just looked down at her from my position much to her anger, or that might've been the sand in the eyes as she was still wiping all of it off her face.

“What are you doing?!” She yelled/asked annoyedly.

“Playing smart. I cannot just charge in without thinking. You'll electrocute me that way.” I say blankly.

I then saw her smile, “Not very smart to stand on something made entirely out of metal.” She stated before clasping her palms on the metal wall and within seconds, white and yellow lights were bouncing on and off the wall getting closer to me.

I thought fast and jumped down. What proceeded next was simply me anticipating her moves from the sound of her muscles tensing up and dodging each electricity fueled punch. Soon she got erratic as she knew I was going to predict and dodge her moves until she ran out of energy and that is exactly what happened. Within minutes, she could barely stand and that's when I went offensive. I chopped at specific weak spots using the side of my hands as to not actually injure her severely. Soon she was on the ground defeated and I raised my blade to her. Now I wasn't going to cut deep, just enough to hinder her movements. I slowly brought my blade closer but then I hesitated, her face distracted me and she took that to her advantage and

clasped her hands onto my blades sending waves of electricity through my body. Next thing I knew, I was on the ground almost paralyzed with smoke fuming off my person. She then dropped backfires on the ground and simply said “Stalemate.”

I came here for pain but barely had any inflicted onto myself other than a minor form of electrocution, yet I was fairly content at that moment, happy even. This women re-ignited my will to live.

Not long after us both falling, some men entered the room holding two stretchers and we were both placed on them before getting hauled off to the emergency room. We were placed in beds and soon **Eren** entered to treat us for our injuries. Now in the week following my initial transformation, I learned that **Eren** acts the way he does because he cannot read social cues and has trust issues but since then, he has been nicer and more tolerable.

“Wow, you fought to a draw and it seems like exhaustion and electrocution did you in. Well done Vlad. You just need some rest as no actual damage was done. But please do us a favor and use the shower next to the bathroom, you’re starting to smell like death.” He said.

He then walked over to the jellyfish girl (Not an insult, her emblem is of a jellyfish.) and basically told her the same thing. Within a short while, I managed to leave my bed and I listened to **Eren** and showered. When I left the shower to dry off, cleaner clothes were placed beneath my towel so once I dried off, I placed them on and noticed that there was now a bat emblem on it. When I left, the jellyfish girl was just getting out of her bed and the two of us headed out.

“Why’d you hesitate?” She asked.

“Don’t know what you’re talking about.” I said trying to capture an emotionless tone but failed. This basically cued her in and she grew a wide smile.

“Wait were you-“ She said but couldn’t finish as she started laughing. I just kept my head down in embarrassment and refused to talk.

“Gotta say that’s a first. Everyone else gets disturbed from these scars.” She explained as she calmed down from her laughing fit.

Head still down, I mumble, “They’re not that distracting.”

“Thanks. You know you’re not so bad yourself ugh...” She said before contemplating something.

“Vlad.” I said.

“Nice to meet you. They call me Nerida.” She replied as she extended her hand out to be shaken.

I don’t want to be tricked and electrocuted again so I avoided shaking her hand with a question, “What do you mean by they call you Nerida?”

“Long story, I’ll tell you after some drinks.” She replied.

I was seriously shocked at this, not at her answer but the fact that she was making me feel something other than emptiness. I actually felt excited to get a drink with her. Another thing was she acted normally. Meeting only crazies this past week, it was refreshing to interact with someone with at least some mental stability. Then again, I am not one to talk as I was debating the prospect of offing myself not two hours earlier.

We entered through the hidden door to the bar and the second we sat down I ordered my shots of vodka as well as some seltzer to wash it down. She then ordered some shots of honey bourbon. She was given four shots but for some reason, I was only given two.

“What the hell man.” I asked the bartender irritably.

“Sorry man, we checked your previous lab results and found your metabolism has spiked immensely. Trust me, two is enough.” The bartender said calmly.

“Fine.” I groan before slouching in my seat. Nerida must have found that hilarious as she started laughing. She then extends one of her shots out and said “Cheers.”

I clanked my glass with hers and we both downed our shots. At first I didn’t really feel anything but after some time passed, I was covered in goosebumps and felt the initial signs of intoxication. It felt weird getting slightly lightheaded after just one shot but hey, it just means I can numb the pain quicker. Plus I can just sip my shots to make them last longer.

I took a slight glance at Nerida enjoying her drink but the second she noticed, I turned away in embarrassment. (Yes I felt ashamed for acting like that but I just couldn’t help myself around her.)

I then see her eyes widen with slightly out of the periphery of my vision. “Is that a tattoo on your neck?” She asked. She noticed my marks.

“No. No they are not.” I said with slight sadness in my words. “These black veins basically marked my sister and I for death in our home country.” I continued somberly as I began to slowly sip my last shot.

“Why?” She asked. A simple and short question but I didn’t want to answer.

“Let’s just say that the media didn’t cover the aftermath of the plague.” I responded not a little tensed up.

She just looked at me funny and asked “What plague?”

I was baffled for a minute but then realized that there is a very little likelihood of us chimeras receiving any information on the outside world. So, as much as it hurt, I told her my story.

She looked very saddened by the events which I relayed and told me she was sorry that I had to go through that.

“Thanks.” I replied a little more happy because of her sentiment. I definitely think the alcohol allowed me to ask my next question as I doubt I could soberly transition from my story to asking her about herself.

She downed her third shot and said, “I honestly don’t know much about my past. Bits and pieces return every now and then but I honestly don’t know who I am. The earliest thing I remember is waking up in a barren wasteland without any knowledge of where I was or even who when I saw soldier kneel down and extend a hand out to me. He brought me to this place and I was placed integrated into the mid wave soldiers.” She said, not disturbed by how surreal or sad it sounded. It seemed like in her mind, losing her memory was just something that happened and not something to worry about. She wasn’t sad losing her memories, family, friends, or even her old life.

I decided not to overthink it and asked, “Mid wave?” All I knew about were the first, second, and third waves. I was never told about the mid waves.

“Yeah. You never heard about us?” She asked to which I just shook my head.

“Well, I’m actually not that surprised as only one other person makes up the wave with me. Before there was a second or even third wave of soldiers, this facility recruited some soldiers and gave them different types of weapons than the previous wave and even changed up the way we went through the process.” She said as if it were the most boring thing ever.

“Wait. I thought you said there was only one other soldier besides yourself?” I asked confused.

“I did didn’t I. It isn’t something the facility enjoys talking about. You know how we are essentially guinea pigs in this place?” She replied.

“Yes.” I said both confused at where she was going with this but also intrigued.

“My wave served as the guinea pigs for both the overall procedure, as well as test subjects for a new experiment. An experiment to give us animal powers without the hassle of us mutating. One person received actual jet boots and a pair of collapsable wings were each fused to his body able to fly. And I was given daily doses of minor electrical shocks and then received my voltage gloves.” She said before finishing her last shot.

“So what happened to the others?” I asked

“Because we weren’t mutated, we each had drawbacks when compared to the first wave.” She explained as her tone turned to one of sadness.

“What kind of drawbacks?” I prodded as I was now too invested in her story.

“Severe mental and physical drawbacks.” I heard another person say. I turned and saw that it was the doctor. “Without going through a mutation to gain their powers, most didn’t have the strength or instinct to face off against the true chimeras of the first. And because their powers were artificially gained through technology instead of genetic enhancement, most couldn’t use their powers properly and most ended up dying by accident.” He lamented with pain.

My eyes went wide, as Nerida continued on where the doctor left off, “It all happened so quickly that it seemed like almost by night, our numbers were reduced to only two. That is when the higher ups decided that we had to be mutated so that we wouldn’t also be met with a horrible fate. I was mostly given jellyfish DNA and a bit of electric eel DNA to help me

produce my own bio-electricity which could be harnessed through my gloves while the other guy was given falcon DNA to help with his flying.” She concluded.

“I am so sorry.” I said.

“Nothing you could have done.” She explains before the doctor places his gloved hand on my shoulder.

“Vlad, can I speak to you for a second?” He asks and after some thought I agree and we left the room.

The second we were out of the bar, he stared at me right in the eyes, allowing me to see that one of his own were artificial and mechanical. “I know what you did Vlad.”

My heart completely stopped at that moment. “WWWWhat do you mean?” I stammered.

“Vlad, you know exactly what I mean. I know you were the one who entered the vault.” He said with such confidence that it was obvious he was not running on assumptions, he is sure of himself. This hit me like a shot to the chest. I could only stand there in fear and anticipation of what will happen next. My breathing became erratic and I started to sweat.

“I was discovered! But how? What will happen next? WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO NINA?” That last thought broke me out of my paralyzing fear and I could only act on instinct. I began to growl “NO!” before raising my blades to his chest but he simply closed his eyes, exhaled and what happened next appeared as if it were in slow motion. His lab coat flew off of his back and two silver objects, no, silver tentacles extended out from his back and whipped forward forcing me off the ground and pinning my arms against the wall. He then lightly placed his hand on my throat but I couldn’t experience the shock of him also being a chimera as I was struggling to break free and attack. Eventually, the doctor narrowed his eyes at me but it wasn’t it

anger, it was something else. We both stood still in that position for what felt like hours but couldn't have been more than ten seconds. I was expecting him to say "I didn't want it to have to come to this Vlad." But instead, he placed his head closer to my own and shushed me before letting go of me. I fell and once I made contact with the floor, I realized that I had no useable moves.

"Listen okay." He whispered in an authoritative voice, one so different from his normal tone and all I could do was nod as the idea of him actually being a chimera finally hit me.

"I'm only going to say this once so pay attention, I know it was you that entered the vault. But, I also know that you weren't acting of your own accord. You are lucky it was me who found out as anyone else would have made you suffer horribly despite the fact that you didn't enter willingly. I am not going to tell anyone so you don't have to worry about that." He explained in his normal calm, collected, and caring tone.

Just then, Apophis and Artaios were walking down the hall and in a concerned voice, Apophis asked "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, Vlad just couldn't handle the alcohol so I had to step in." He said with such cunning that no one would ever expect it of being a blatant lie.

Fearing for both my and Nina's safety, I quickly make flailing motions and incoherent speech to better sell the fact that I was greatly intoxicated when in reality, I was just buzzed. The two of them look at me and they quickly believe the doctor's statement and walk off but not before Apophis asks the doctor to take care of me to which he simply gives a thumbs up. I then hear Artaios say "I didn't even know he had tentacles."

With them gone, I spoke up and asked, "How did you find out? How do I know you won't tell the higher ups? Why did you attack me?"

“It doesn’t matter how I know and you have my word that this topic doesn’t leave the two of us. And you basically brought it on yourself as you were going to attack me before I finished explaining. I restrained you because I was in fear for my safety.” He said before extending his hand and helping me up. Maybe it was the way he spoke or the fact that he was the first actually nice person I met in this place but I trusted that he would honor his word. I then grabbed his hand (by the side so I didn’t accidentally stab him) and got back to my feet.

“Why did you tell me though?” I asked him.

“So you don’t get cocky and think you got away with it.” Her responded normally as if nothing had just happened.

“Can you tell me what it was that I saw in there?” I asked. He then darted his eyes around.

“It’s too dangerous to discuss here. Maybe at another time in a less open area.” He quickly whispers. Affirming the fact that he is not against telling me what I ~~want~~ need to know.

The doctor then walked over to pick up his lab coat and when his back was facing me, I noticed a few interesting things. Those tentacles were not mechanical, the silver coating was more like armor. I realized that they were not weaponry like my blades as there were no metal fusing scars and where the tentacles and his back met, it looked like they sprouted out instead of being placed there. The other thing I saw was that this guy was wearing two holsters on his back. Holsters for swords. Perhaps the alcohol was finally taking charge over my judgment but I couldn’t help myself from thinking how much cooler this guy keeps getting.

The two of us return to the bar and see I see Nerida nearly unconscious and her body bent over the chair. Her upper body was nearly on the floor and I could see a huge smile of

enjoyment plastered on her upside down face. Her cheeks were red as tomatoes and she was clutching a half empty bottle of whiskey.

“Hey.” She said with such glee.

“What happened.” I asked trying to suppress my laughter as the sight was honestly funny.

“She threatened to electrocute me if I didn’t give her a bottle of whiskey.” The bartender say in a pretty scared tone. “This is why I don’t like serving the mid waves, restraints won’t always work.” He continued. I looked closer and saw that her torso was literally strapped into the seat.

“She’s got a drinking problem.” The doctor whispers in my ear. And what followed was literally the funniest response I’ve ever heard to that.

“HEY! *hiccup* IT’S ONLY A PROBLEM WHEN I RUN OUT!” She stammered.

I was on the floor laughing at that and the doctor simply smirked and said “I’ll take care of this.” before going behind the counter and filling a glass with water. He then helps Nerida face upright, undoes her restraints, and pours the water into her mouth.

She coughs for a bit but after a while, she is back to relaxed. “Hey, mind helping me Vlad?” The doctor asked.

“Uhm sure.” I reply and soon, the two of us were lifting her up off the chair and carried her back to the living quarters. Me were just entering the hallway when she proceeds to empty her guts.

“Just leave it for now.” The doctor said.

Eventually, we make it to the living quarters and just a few doors down from my own is her room. The three of us enter the room and the doctor and I tuck her into her bed. I then get a bright idea and enter her bathroom and pull out a trashcan. I placed it next to her bed and the two of us left her to sleep off her intoxication.

“So, if you don’t mind my asking, what happened to her face? It looks like she got stung by a jellyfish.” I asked as we began heading for my room.

“My superior, or as you like to say, the bastard did that to her.” He said in a sullen tone.

My eyes grew wide in anger as the doctor continued. “Like with any other ‘test subject’ (he air quoted this) in this facility, the bastard took things too far. He made certain changes to her injections and as always refused to consult anyone on the matter. He then wanted to get creative and supposedly after charging the serum for much longer than recommended, he gave her an injection directly into her facial tissue. Apparently, he wanted to test how the DNA would affect her appearance. Little did he know that his changes to the injections contents combined with the fact that he improperly charged the vile resulted in the serum becoming acidic which burned her face.” The doctor explained with visible anger and discomfort in his voice.

“WHAT?! How is he not fired?!” I yelled out flabbergasted.

“Your guess is as good as mine. It would honestly bring me no greater pleasure than to have him leave.” He said with even more anger building up in his words.

“That’s not nice.” A voice then interjects. This voice had such happiness in its tone that it sent a chill down my spine due to how unsettling it was from the mood of the room.

Shocked by this sudden intrusion on our conversation, I turned to face whoever was behind us and guess what, it was the bastard with his wide, sadistic grin. Right after I saw him, I had the genius thought of attacking him once again.

“Catch him off guard, take him to the ground and make him pay for everything he has done.” I thought. But immediately after that idea popped in my head, I had a moment of clarity and decided that I was already in enough hot water with the vault incident and I didn’t want to give him any reason to hurt Nina.

“Leave me alone already, I am seriously not in the mood.” I groaned.

“Too bad. You have no say in the matter so just make this easy on yourself.” He said in a joyous tone but I could tell he was hoping I would resist.

“Okay just get it over with.” I said as I extended my arm out. I knew that there was only one way this interaction would end and that was with him sticking me with a needle. I was choosing the path of least resistance hoping that it would be the safest choice. Oh how I wish I just picked violence. If I chose that path, there might have been a chance that I would not be experiencing such agonizing pain right now.

“Oh these aren’t for your arms.” He said gleefully as he pulled out two large syringes. My eyes went wide with terror as I began to think of where he intended to place those needles.

“Don’t even think about it.” The doctor said now clearly pissed off.

“Oh, Kelly, I didn’t see you there. Don’t you have a radiator to fix or someone to heal.” He said this with so much authority that it somehow made the situation creepier. He was telling us that he had power over us and that he could do whatever he wanted, all from just the tone of his voice.

“But-“ The doctor tried to defend himself but was cut off.

“LEAVE!!!!” The bastard yelled furiously.

“I’m sorry.” He mouthed to me before giving the bastard the most evil and disdainful glare as he began walking away.

“Now, as I was saying, these are not for your arms. These babies are going into your back.” He said happily.

“Your back.” This word echoed for what felt like a full minute as each hair on my body began to stand on end.

“No fucking way am I going to let you stick me in the back with those things!” I yelled as I began to back away. My intentions were to get to my room before the bastard got any closer and lock myself inside.

“I never said anything about you letting me, if anything, I hope you put up a struggle. Today has lacked any trace of excitement and resistance will really spice things up.” He said as he cocked his head to the left at such an angle that I thought his neck might snap.

“THIS MAN IS FUCKING SADISTIC!!!” I screamed out internally as sweat began to pour out of every inch of my body.

He began to approach me like a crazed stalker does to their prey. Sinisterly and slowly, almost each step he took was in tune with my ever-growing heartbeat... Then, he struck. It happened so fast, one second he was a good five feet from me, the next I was on the floor and he was on top of me. He then forced me into rotating my body so that my stomach was on the floor.

He then used some object, maybe a rope or something to bound my arms behind my back and then, he stabbed me. He just stuck me in the shoulder blades with full force and absolutely zero regard for my health and safety.

I couldn't even gasp in terror and pain as the full force of impact from those needles left my body in a near paralyzed state and I could barely breath as it was let alone gasp. My mouth widened but nothing came out. Then, those needles hit bone, they did not grade or scrape against my shoulder blades, instead, they punctured through them and I then felt this impossibly hot substance pour out of those needles and enter my bone marrow. It hurt so much, like when Ix stabbed my shoulders but somehow even more painful despite being a substantially smaller wound. It felt like my insides were on fire and once the liquid ceased from pouring out from the shots, he just ripped them out as if he were pulling weeds. His merciless action resulted in my blood adding color to the previously blank walls.

The asshole then lifted himself up from against my spine and contorted his body to crack his bones.

"Ah." He said blissfully all the while I was attempting to get back up but my back wouldn't left me. I can only guess but I expect that at that moment I must have appeared like an infant who had just collapsed after attempting to walk for the first time.

"Quit being so dramatic, I didn't even administer the shots that hard." He said as if my pain was fabricated.

"I swear, one day you will get what's coming to you." I whispered through gritted teeth.

"What was that?" He said slightly irritated as he crouched down to my level.

“I said karma will be a bitch.” I remarked as I gave him the most evil stare I could give.

“Unlikely.” He said as he got back up and left, but not before leaving me with this message, “You really shouldn’t make threats you cannot deliver on. Now get back to your room before you leak any more blood.”

I clenched my fists so hard my knuckles turned ghostly white and I smashed them on the ground.

I tried to get up again but my arms just couldn’t lift up the weight of my body. I then heard slow footsteps approach me from where the bastard was heading and I immediately said “Isn’t temporarily crippling me enough?” I yelled.

I then heard a feminine sigh and then a soft, gentle, and somewhat muscular arm reached out and helped me back up. When I was fully upright and doing everything in my power to stop my back from collapsing, I turned my head and saw it was Ix.

She started walking me over to my room with a seemingly blank expression on her face. She opened my door and gently aided me into my bed. I was lying on my chest as to not put pressure on my back and Ix was standing right next to me and began staring into space before sighing. She then looked at me for a few seconds of pure silence when she finally spoke up, “You know you look like death right.” She said in a playful yet condescending tone.

“Thanks.” I said sarcastically as I rolled my eyes.

“Here, you probably need this more than me. Benefits of being a ” She claimed as she reached into her pocket and pulled out a cigarette and a lighter.

Now, I should add the fact that I used to have a serious problem with smoking and have been clean for almost three years but right now, I did not care about my attempts to rid myself from that vice.

“Thank you Ix.” I said with gratitude as I placed it into my mouth and she pulled out a lighter and lit it.

“Don’t mention it. Benefits of being a first wave though.” She replied as I began to smoke it but the second I breathed in, I had an intense coughing fit.

“Oh, right, I should’ve warned you, those things are freaking strong as hell.” She remarked with a slight smile growing across her face.

“No shit.” I said between coughs.

“So what happened out there, you pick a fight or something?” She asked

I waited for the coughing to subside and said “The asshole stabbed me with full force directly in my spine with a new injection.” I answered.

“Hmm, that’s a new one for Faust.” She whispered in such a quiet voice that if it weren’t for my superhuman hearing.

“Faust?” I questioned.

“Ezekiel Faust, sadist extraordinaire.” She replied.

Despite now knowing his real name, I am probably going to still call him bastard or asshole.

“You should probably take it easy, God only knows what was inside those shots.” She explains.

“You’re probably right, but can you first hand me that notebook and pencil on the counter?” I asked.

“Sure.” She said before tossing them onto the bed and then leaving in my room.

After writing my day out on this paper, I decided that what I need is to rest my wounds, my body was still sore enough without the attack from Faust. I tried to sleep but woke up an unknown time later to an intense wave of pain. My entire body was in utter agony and my bed was covered in sweat. I tried to move but I was paralyzed.

“Not again!” I cried out before my tongue stung with the taste of both salt and...copper. It was too much to handle and I found myself gagging profusely. I couldn’t hold it in anymore and ended up puking all over the side of my bed. It looked like a black syrupy substance with a mix of red. It looked disgusting and smelt disgusting but there was nothing I could do. I then heard shuffling in my room, “There is someone else in here.” I thought as I regained control of my arms and began clenching my stomach. I tried looking around but I couldn’t see anyone. Even in the darkness of my room, I could see everything due to what has happened to my sense of sight, but I couldn’t determine where the intruder was. I then started to click my tongue and close my eyes and I immediately discovered where the intruder was hiding. I got out of bed but my legs collapsed on me the second they made contact with the floor. I still felt like crap but I was not going to allow an invisible intruder get the best of me. I slumped over to the area where I sensed the intruder and mustered enough strength to raise my blade only to be met with a hard kick right to my abdomen. I instantly fell to the ground and heard loud footsteps leaving my room as the door quickly opened and slammed shut.

Then, he pulled out a strange tubular object and twisted its cap releasing the highest pitch sound I have ever heard. It was like a knife to my ears and I honestly thought my brain was seconds from exploding.

I tried, I really did. The entire time I had been here I had endured the torture and held it together. I knew that I couldn't lose control...but, I just couldn't take it anymore. I lost control causing me to cross the line of no return. I am so far gone that I cannot even consider myself human anymore, I am a monster.

Looking back that day seemed so normal... If only I knew how things would turn out, maybe I could have stopped it.

The day began with the food tray falling to the ground, my breakfast was just like the hundreds I've had prior but for some reason, I had a pit in my stomach, I knew that I was being watched. Immediately on alert, I scanned the room but there was no one there.

"You're just being paranoid Vlad, calm down." I said quietly before finishing maybe half of my breakfast and heading to the weight room. Unsurprisingly, Ix was inside on the rock wall. She was just using her spikes to climb up and down the wall so quickly that it appeared as if she were jumping rather than climbing. She saw me and said a quick hello before continuing her climb. I on the other hand decided to go on the treadmill, I grabbed two fifteen pound weights and set the machine to fourteen miles per hour.

Amidst my running, I couldn't help but chuckle, before my transformation the best I could do was seven miles per hour with two and a half pound weights. I was nearing twenty three minutes when that pit in my stomach returned and the blood inside my mark began to boil again. I had to stop the machine because I felt like I was about to trip and get sandpapered.

As the treadmill slowed down, I dropped my weights and darted my head around the large room but there was nothing...well, nothing except Ix jabbing away at the rock, now too high to even see. That's when I felt a jolt of electricity shock me in the leg causing it to go limp. I fell down and when I looked up, there was Nerida, followed by Apophis, Karkinos, and

surprisingly Ōmukade. I gave Ōmukade a glare as I still did not trust the cyborgs but at least the boiling emanating from my mark was not just paranoia.

Almost like he was able to sense my hatred, Ōmukade glared with the same level of disdain I had. He then twitched his head to his right shoulder in a jerking motion.

Then, Ix decided to drop in on the conversation, and I don't mean metaphorically, she literally dropped in on this conversation by jumping off the rock wall. Honestly, I am surprised she didn't hit us but moreover, she knew that Ōmukade would catch her and prevent her from injuring herself.

"What are you all doing here?" Ix asked curiously "It is rare for this many people to be in the weight room." She added.

Ōmukade simply scoffed and dropped her before heading towards the weights.

"Hey! What's wrong? You're usually very talkative." I yelled at Ōmukade but was only met with an evil and angry look. If looks could kill, we would all be dead right now.

He then continued to the weights and I asked the group, "What do you think his problem is?"

"Probably still pissed that you managed to beat him in a fight." Apophis suggested, "I know I'd be sore if I thought I were indestructible only to be defeated."

"No that's not it." I said, "It is something else, even after the fight, he has been respectful."

"Eh, he's probably just not having a good day, leave him to his weights and ignore him." Ix said.

"Speaking of which, why would a robot even need to work out? I mean, wouldn't a robot's capabilities already be at max?" Nerida asked.

We all simply shrugged as we didn't understand that either.

Shortly after, I continued on the treadmill and Nerida used the one next to me while Apophis and Ix both basically had a climbing competition on the wall, both using their weapons to propel them upwards. It honestly looked like a jaguar racing a snake up a mountain, Apophis movements mirrored a snake slithering while Ix resembled a jaguar hopping from point to point with swift accurate movements.

Meanwhile, Nerida and I had a race of our own, but ours was more of a race of endurance which I didn't really expect to win. This is largely due to the fact that I was running with heavier weights and four miles faster.

Maybe twenty minutes after we began our race, my arms were getting tired so I dropped the weights and she followed suit. After the weights were gone, she increased her speed but I could tell that she was getting tired. That was when she decided to shoot a small bolt of electricity into my thigh causing me to collapse and subsequently, get sandpapered by the treadmill. I quickly got back up with a few minor scrapes that didn't even draw blood and while I should have been mad that she pulled such a cheap trick to win, I could not help but smile. She just has that affect on me, and I wiped myself off before quickly increasing her speed causing her to lose balance and also get sandpapered. She picked herself up as I turned her machine off and then she got in my face.

"That was uncalled for!" She yelled at me right to my face trying to look angry but then she and I both laughed.

"Oh, that was uncalled for." I said cynically but also jokingly. "How about we continue this little competition in the training facility?"

“Deal!” She remarked excitedly before yelling out exactly what I was thinking, “How about we make things interesting? HEY IX, APOPHIS, YOU GUYS WANNA FIGHT!!”

She said the magic word, FIGHT, and within the next few seconds, the two of them jumped down hitting the trampoline base in front of the wall and after they stopped bouncing, they approached us panting heavily and agreed to fight after a little bit to regain their breathe. We each then grabbed towels to clear off the sweat and headed towards the water fountain to grab a quick drink in order to both rehydrate and refresh ourselves.

Once that was done, we each entered the room when Ix suggested, “Boys vs girls?”

We all shrugged in agreement and we split up to opposite sides. I told Apophis that I’ll take care of Nerida and he can take care of Ix but he did like that idea.

“You kidding me? No! I’ll take on Nerida and you can fight the jaguar goddess!” He said as if he were scared of actually fighting her.

“You were competing against her not ten minutes ago.” I countered.

“In a race! Every time we fight I am afraid she’ll actually kill me!”

“Good grief.” I whisper but almost right when I say that, I get jump kicked by Ix in the stomach.

Akheilios

Nerida

Apophis

Ōmukade

Karkinos

Artaios

Ixchel

Eren

Kelly