

Ty-Shou was three years old, but not a child. He had appeared fully formed in a ball of Light. The people of Bei-San claimed he was the reincarnation of a long dead god. Every step Ty-Shou took in the city was met with rapturous praise. People told him of all the legendary feats he had accomplished in his past life. They said that Ty-Shou built the city of Bei-San itself, that he had sheltered the people from the great turmoil of the Age of the Gods, that he had been able to transform people into the best versions of themselves.

He didn't remember any of it.

"My Synodontis, please focus," the use of Ty-Shou's formal title cut through his introspection. The words came from Wo-Sa, his closest advisor and the man that guided him through his return, and the rise of fame that had come with it. Wo-Sa had the silver hair— thinning at the temples— and silver eyes typical of a Bei-Sanian. His wrinkled bronze skin was similarly typically of the city's populous. He was shorter than the average Bei-Sanian, and almost two heads shorter than Ty-Shou, but he carried himself with authority regardless. The old man easily filled the voluminous multi-coloured robes favoured by the cities' aristocrats. His own colours were more muted than those worn by the two other servants in the room.

"We've had this lesson a thousand times already. Can we at least go outside if we're going to be repeating lessons?" Wo-Sa insisted on conducting Ty-Shou's lessons in the same room every day, no matter the season or weather. The room was at the heart of the palace and had no windows. It was lit in an iridescent glow from the Light Crystals around its perimeter.

"If you stayed engaged throughout the lesson, perhaps I could rest assured that you understood the material." Ty-Shou hated the soft, suffering look Wo-Sa so often had. "Now, what is this Crystal used for?"

Wo-Sa proffered a perfectly black Crystal, one that appeared more as an absence of light than an actual object.

"It's a Dark Crystal. A full Dark Crystal," Wo-Sa gestured with his fingers, urging Ty-Shou to go on. "This one is filled with a memory of a great battle. You're going to use your Heraldry to show me the memory so I understand how brutal the Vareeshi are."

"Good, but do not roll your eyes when you speak. The Synodontis does not roll their eyes."

Ty-Shou rolled his eyes again. The young god truly didn't understand this song and dance. From his first lessons in geopolitics, Wo-Sa had emphasized how brutal the Vareeshi religion was. It assumed no morals beside might makes right and winner takes all, where people swore themselves to great men in the hope they would conquer all and lead them to eternal paradise. In Bei-San, the Vareeshi

were a religious minority. But it was the only way of life for most of the neighbouring Central Marthian nations. Now that Ty-Shou was to leave the city for the first time, Wo-Sa had been insistent on reviewing and amplifying every lesson he had had on the Vareeshi. Wo-Sa still thought Ty-Shou didn't properly understand it, and had devised to show him a memory of Vareeshi brutality. Wo-Sa helped seeing how they made their hierarchies, and how brutal the King Making fighting was would work better than lecturing Ty-Shou.

With a flourish of from the older man's hand the two servants covered the Light Crystals, plunging the room into darkness. Wo-Sa's weathered fingers gripped Ty-Shou's forehead. The outline of the Crystal in the advisor's hand gave a false glow as Ty-Shou felt himself plunging into the false sleep of memory viewing.

Ty-Shou didn't know much about the man who's memories he now inhabited. The Synodontis knew instantly that his new body was shorter than his real one. Height was always one of easiest ways for Ty-Shou to spot an inserted memory.

He stood near the centre of a vast circular chamber. Pillars of painted red wood around the perimeter rose 50 feet up to hold up a wooden ceiling, intricately engraved with Vareeshi writing. On all sides of Ty-Shou a frantic mob pushed in, jockeying for position. Everyone in the chamber fixated on a towering triangle in the very centre, nearly the height of the chamber itself. Ty-Shou knew from his lessons that the triangle was made of a specific wood, found only in the Central Marthian valleys where the Vareeshi monks made their homes. The triangle was split into multiple tiers, each bigger than then the last, and filled with intricately designed wooden balls.

Ty-Shou held a similar wooden ball in his hand. Half his ball was plain wood, the other intricately carved and painted. He knew the ball was meant to represent the life journey of the person who's memory he inhabited, but Ty-Shou was unable to properly interpret the precise, dense writing and images on it.

The ranks of the crowd inched forward, and Ty-Shou found himself at the head of the crowd before long. Near the base of the triangle, a monk in grey robes stood with his hand out for Ty-Shou. Ty-Shou watched his hand move and place the ball in the monk's palm. The monk placed it at the bottom of the triangle, in last place. Once the ball was in place, another monk--- in the same gray robes ---handed Ty-Shou a circular tag with a number on it. Ty-Shou knew it was a very large number, the same number as the amount of balls now in the pyramid. Ty-Shou placed the tag around his neck, like everyone else in the chamber had. That same monk called out his name with

his number, and the crowd yelled it back in a chant. Suddenly, Ty-Shou felt the edges of his consciousness blurring as the memory skipped forward.

The memory rematerialized as Ty-Shou found himself in the middle of a battle. He was shoulder to shoulder with other men, all holding spears. Mere feet away, the enemy formation of spears thrust forward. All the men he could see wore simple leather armour. This memory was old, at least four-hundred years old, according to Wosa.

A spear tip grazed Ty-Shou's cheek, and he felt searing pain shoot through his body. An equally intense freezing fear set into his bones. Ty-Shou couldn't tell if the fear was his own, or from the memory. Before he could decide, he felt himself jolt forward in a lunge. His spear tip danced past an enemy spear and found purchase in their neck. Shoulders pressed up against Ty-Shou as his formation took a step forward. The man next to him dropped as the enemy thrust forward. Ty-Shou's spear frantically worked to parry incoming attacks, but the enemy formation pressed forward endlessly. Pained moans from his allies filled the air. Men from the back ranks of the formation moved to fill the gaps as the injured were dragged to the back. A whistle blew and Ty-Shou was pulled back as a new front rank swapped in. He felt exhausted, more than he ever had in his short life. His body sagged with the effort, and leaning on his spear was all that kept Ty-Shou from slumping.

The yelling from the formation's head grew louder and nearer. His grasp on Vareeshi was weak, but he was sure the yelling was in a dialect he hadn't been taught. Around him men snapped to attention. Ty-Shou's grip on his spear tightened. A sudden wave of motion knocked him on the ground as a group of the enemy burst through the ranks.

Two men led the charge of the enemy spearhead. The nearest had long black hair tied in a bun above his head and a slender face. He wore light leather armour, like the other enemy soldiers. Three men charged him, and each was easily defeated. The man weaved through attacks perfectly, parrying each with his straight-edged blade. The second man had short, cropped black hair, and a scar across his left eye. Three discs spun around him creating a protective radius around a foot wide. Ty-Shou knew this was obviously Space Heraldry.

The Space Herald's eyes snapped to Ty-Shou and a disc came flying towards him. He rolled in the bloody dirt, causing the disc to barely miss. The second man must have been a powerful Herald to move the disc so fast. He scrambled to his feet, barely dodging as the disc came back around. The Herald was keeping his distance well, his ally dispatching attacks before they could threaten the

Herald. The long-haired man moved with inhuman efficiency. He slipped between spears and parried attacks in perfect rhythm, with no wasted energy in each action. It was the same pattern of attack, repeated. The long-haired man would slip an opportunistic attack from behind, before lunging for the man in front of him. His blade thrust between his victim's armour. Before the dying man could drop to the ground, the lightning-quick swordsman would reach out with his off-hand to grab the number tag around his victim's neck.

Ty-Shou felt fear from the man whose memory he inhabited, but the god knew what the inhumane attack was. A Time Herald. One of the Subject Tree. It explained his superhuman reactions to attacks he shouldn't logically have time to react to, and how he always managed to perfect place himself and his blade. Judging by the number of number tags in his hand the man must have killed nearly three dozen men in his rampage. Two Heralds as skilled as these two could easily break route a hundred men undisciplined men. Ty-Shou saw it happening. The fear building in the soldiers around him, those near the back looking to flee and being pushed back by the elite rear guard. He let out a fierce roar and charged towards the Space Herald. A disc shot out from the Herald in response. Ty-Shou ducked his head and felt the disc graze the top of his hair. Two shouts rose from the crowd as two other soldiers joined Ty-Shou. He could feel his heart beat in his ears as he ran. In three years, his heart had never beat so strongly.

They were fifteen paces off the Space Herald now, maybe twelve from his defensive radius. Two discs came at him now, one flying from around the Herald, the other coming in on the right flank. The soldier on his right caught the disc clean across the throat. The disc slowed to a brief crawl as the Space Herald pulled the soldier's number tag off and towards the Herald. Ty-Shou thrust out at the head on disc, managing to knock it enough to make the Space Herald lose control.

They were ten paces off now, and the Space Herald had only one disc remaining. If Ty-Shou could close the gap before he brought the other two discs back on defense, he had a chance to kill the Herald.

A shoulder slammed into Ty-Shou. He stuck the butt of his spear in the ground, barely keeping upright. Before he could turn his head a punch clocked him clean across his face, and he was sent flying back to the bloody dirt. The final other soldier in Ty-Shou's desperate charge neared enough to thrust at the Time Herald. The Herald leaned his body perfectly enough to dodge the thrust. The soldier pulled his spear back and the Herald slipped down the shaft to within the weapons reach.

Ty-Shou jumped to his feet to defend his fellow soldier. He pulled a short dagger from his belt and jumped on the shoulders of the Time Herald. The Herald thrashed trying to throw Ty-Shou off. He locked his legs and elbow around the opponent and stabbed down with his dagger. The Herald

jerked his hand up to catch Ty-Shou's forearm. The other soldier, discarding his spear, ran up to kick out the Herald's leg. The Herald rapidly twisted around the kick. In the same motion he jerked Ty-Shou's arm down and over, shifting his body weight into a throw.

For the third time in the fight Ty-Shou felt himself thrown onto the ground, this time he was on top of his ally. The whizzing of a Space disc cut the air as it embedded himself in the other nameless soldier. Ty-Shou rolled off the body but was pressed to the ground by the Time Herald. He tried to stab the Herald's leg but he had lost the dagger in his fall. His unarmed punch barely phased the Herald as he plunged his sword down and between Ty-Shou's eyes.

Ty-Shou was panting and covered in cold sweats when he came out of the memory. The servants had uncovered the Light Crystals at some point.

"Do you understand now?" Wo-Sa asked.

Ty-Shou felt sluggish coming out of the memory and could barely move his head to nod, but his body was still shivering. "That was... what was that feeling? I-I've never felt anything like ."

"Fear," Wo-Sa said solemnly. "It is one of the most common, and important emotions. It has been a failing of mine that I did not get you to experience it sooner."

"Why-- how could that be so common? So important?" Ty-Shou looked up to his advisor with wide eyes. He remembered that Wo-Sa had told him of horrible wars, and that the world was far more chaotic beyond the palace walls, but what possible reason could there be for people to feel like /this/, and for it to be /right?/

"I'm glad you understand that now."

Ty-Shou knew his heart wasn't racing, but he could still hear the drumming of a heartbeat in his ears. The lingering effects of the memory but have been evident, as Wo-Sa knelt down to meet Ty-Shou's seated eye level.

"You are the most powerful Herald to have ever lived. Those Heralds in the vision have barely a fraction of your power, my Synodontis." Wo-Sa reached out to grab Ty-Shou's hand. "I've tried to instill in you how powerful you are, how much capacity for good you have. Perhaps now you understand both how brutal the Vareeshi are, and how much power you hold-- to prevent others from having the same fate-- the same /fear/-- as the man in that vision."

Ty-Shou didn't reply, only nodded. If this really was how the world was, Wo-Sa was right-- he did have a duty.

"Come, it's time to leave for Cong Lang. We must ensure we make all our appearances at the festivities before King Making begin in earnest."

Ty-Shou rose from the chair with a shake of his head. "Of course not."

The streets of Bei-San were overcrowded for his procession out of the city. Ty-Shou rode in a two-tiered carriage, pulled by six horses. The carriage had been originally commissioned by the Stewards of Bei-San, the noble family appointed to lead the councils of nobles and govern Bei-San in Ty-Shou's stead. The carriage was a reflection of the prestige and history of the city: it was made of black lacquered wood, with a polished gold trim along its edges, and the panels were engraved with art depicting the most famous of Ty-Shou's feats. The door panel had his favourite engraving; it pictured him standing against a dragon coiling around the world.

The bottom tier was designed as a regular carriage for long distance travel. It had padded seats, which could be made out into a full bed by his servants. Light curtains gave privacy, but allowed in a light breeze while on the move. The top level was a viewing platform. A waist high railing ran around its edge, allowing Ty-Shou to stand and wave out at the Bei-Sanian citizens as his carriage wound its way out from the palace at the city's heart.

Wo-Sa had held back no level of splendor for the parade. The trip to Cong Lang had a stripped-down escort, despite that every one of his mounted Royal Guards had on perfect dress uniforms. A long stark white tunic which flowed down to below the knees, cut in the middle to allow for comfortable riding. A golden belt secured at their waist gave the top of the uniform a sharp triangular silhouette, and the tunic was trimmed in the same shade of gold. Their tall black hats provided minimal shade, with a thin rim. The symbol of Bei-San was embroidered in the centre of the chest: a blazing sixteen-pointed sun held in the palm of Ty-Shou's hand.

The Imperial Guard were selected for their size and strength. No man was shorter than Ty-Shou; all were at least twelve hands tall. Each wore two weapons. A long sword for unmounted combat, and a curved cavalry blade.

At their head was Ji-Xing. The head of Ty-Shou's guard, and Field Marshall, wore a white hat to match his white uniform. At forty-five man was past his physical prime, but could easily beat five

of the other Royal Guard at once. This face was nearly a perfect square with a jawline that could cut glass. A scar across his eye gained during his youth only added to his fierce appearance.

As they passed alleys, Ty-Shou could see people lining up thirty, even fifty ranks deep to try and get a glimpse of their god. From the window of passing houses, and from the nearest ranks on the street, Ty-Shou could hear Bei-Sanians yelling for blessings. Some even prostrated themselves on the pavement in attempt to garner his favour. A yell to bless a sickly relative. A cry to aid a son on an examination. They were all cries Ty-Shou had heard before, and all aid Ty-Shou had no power to grant.

His powers allowed him to heal some of the sick and wounded, but only if he was in the correct mental state. But he couldn't bless people with better fortune, or perform any true miracles. He was a powerful Herald, and some really believed that one day he would bless them all with great fortune, and perform great and holy miracles. And so, they didn't just call him a great Herald, or even 'king', or 'majesty.' They called him God.