

Due Process

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Demongate High

Due Process

The Unveiled World

Helping People Club

Finding The Balance

Learning The World

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Paragon Universe

Lonely Divide

Due Process

Robert Ziefel

This is a work of fiction. All the characters, organizations and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination, arose through the Demongate High Paragon campaign played by Robert Ziefel and his friends, or are used fictitiously.

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For Sean

Without whom, this book would never have existed

Due Process

1

The Letter

Calm, relaxed breathing is essential for stressful situations.

“Happy Birthday, Dean,” said the man standing across the dimly lit table, having set a cake down in front of me. The fourteen candles atop it created a soft glow about the room, shadows flickering about the walls.

“Thank you, father,” I replied. Of course, I called this man father, but he wasn’t my father at all. Also absent from the room was my mother, of whom I had no more memory than vague feelings from long, long ago. This man’s name was Donald Lum, and he had looked after me since the time my parents disappeared, twelve years or so ago, according to him. I had asked him many times about their disappearance and how I came to live with him instead, but always it was the same answer: “When you’re older.”

I had little hope even now that turning fourteen would change this policy, and so I did not expect any different answer today than before. I had almost given up hope, thinking that perhaps they had died in some gruesome manner from which he was sparing me. He was not unkind, and he was caring, but I think there was always a tension between us; he raised me, but he was not my father. I often asked myself, late at night when I had trouble sleeping, if that really mattered one way or the other. I knew it didn’t, but yet, somehow it did. And never knowing a mother, well, I knew people who had lost their mother to divorce or death, which would have been easier. Mine was just... gone. Gone where? “When you’re older.”

You may ask me as you gaze about the dining room in our modest suburban home, if you are turning fourteen, where are your friends, Dean? Why do they not share the table along with your foster parent on this happy occasion? The truth of the matter was I had few friends, for one reason or another. Mainly I just liked being left alone, but more than that, I felt I was different, somehow, to those around me. They seemed to sense it too, and basically left me to myself. I didn’t mind, honestly. I occupied my time with building things, like models, or helping Donald repair watches or jewelry in the tiny shop he ran outside the city. He said I had good watchmaker hands, whatever that meant, and he often

set me to simple tasks like replacing main springs and verifying steady pulse rates in pocket watches. Are you curious about what city we're in? Kokomo, Indiana. Excitement capital of the world, to be sure.

Blowing out the candles, I belatedly realized I had forgotten to make a wish. But really, even if my parents did come back, I wouldn't even know them, so what was the point? Donald and I spoke, and ate cake, and when the dishes were cleared away he cleared his throat and took on a serious look.

"Sit a moment longer, Dean. There are a few things I need to give you today. Let me go get them."

"Sure thing," I replied, slightly mystified. I had been given my gifts before dinner, that very afternoon. What else could there be?

Soon enough Donald returned carrying a small box and a padded envelope. He sat down and stared at them for a moment, then sighed and pushed them over to me.

"The envelope first, alright? The box after I explain a few things."

Getting more curious now, I reached for the envelope and spun it around to read who it was from. Somewhat surprisingly for all the fuss Donald was making about it, there was no return address. I pulled the tab and pushed it open a little, tipping it into the overhead light now illuminating the room. Something that looked like cloth patches and some stapled together letters were inside, so I shook them out. Onto the table fell three red and white cloth patches, each with the same funny symbol on them. They immediately reminded me of the pieces of paper you sometimes seen thrown around by Japanese cartoon characters. I looked up at Donald. "What's this?"

"You should read the letter and stuff and then I can answer all your questions."

I shrugged and pulled out the papers, seeing the top one as some sort of introduction letter or something. I read it. Then I read it again. Then I flipped through the other pages, and read the letter again.

"This is some sort of joke, right?"

"I can work with that."

"What?"

"Sorry, I just wasn't sure what to expect when you read it."

"What am I supposed to say? It says here I'm the 'best and brightest' which is a big laugh, but the upshot is you're sending me away to some strange school I've never heard of? Why?"

"It has to do with your parents, I'm afraid."

“What? My- now wait just a minute! What about my parents? Are you finally going to tell me what happened to them?”

“I’m finally going to tell you about the last time I saw them, yes. I am quite truthful when I say I really have no idea what happened to them.”

I looked back at the letter, and the packet containing maps, class schedules, club descriptions, then back at Donald. “So how does this school relate to my parents?”

“Your mother went there.”

“What, really?” I said, excited now. “Is attending classes there going to help me track her down or something? What’s this all about?”

“I’m sorry, I’m not doing a very good job of this. I’ve been trying to figure out how to tell you for a couple of weeks now as your birthday was coming up. I still don’t have any real idea. Look, just open the box, and I’ll start at the beginning.”

“Whatever you say,” I said, more confused now than ever. The box, I now noticed, had one of those weird pieces of paper on it covering the top, presumably glued over the flaps, as I didn’t see any tape on the edges. I held up the badge, “Does this have anything to do with...”

“Yes, it has everything to do with that.”

I nodded, looking the box over. Basically just a beat up cardboard box, about five inches to a side, square. Apart from the paper on top, it was taped on the bottom and that was it. I put a finger under the top flap and tried to tear the paper off so I could open it. To my surprise, it didn’t budge.

“Try putting your hand over it and saying your name,” Donald suggested.

I looked at him like he was crazy, and got up to get the utility knife out of the drawer in the other room. I came back in and clicked the knife up, stabbing it down into the paper. Again I was surprised when the knife was stopped cold by this flimsy piece of paper, rather than tearing in two like I expected.

“Like I said, you better just tell it who you are or we’ll be here all night.” The edges of his mouth quirked up a little like he was trying very hard not to smile. I glared at him.

“A piece of paper is going to get the better of me, is that what you’re saying?”

“It’s called a ward. And yes, it is. I think the box is a talisman of some sort, keyed to the ward to be Invulnerable, as your mother told me

only you would be able to open it.”

“What, it’s from Krypton? It’s a cardboard box, I’ll just cut it here.” I proceeded to try stabbing into the side of it, then to slice the tape from the bottom. As I suppose you can guess by now, I didn’t get very far.

“Ready to give up?” said Donald, a slight twinkle in his eye. It seemed now he was struggling not to laugh. Great, it looked like I was being defeated by a cardboard box tonight after all. I sighed. “We’ll play it your way then,” and put my hand on the top: “Open up, magic box, for I, Dean Chesterfield, command it!” The box crumbled to dust before my very eyes.

“What?!” I said, jerking my hand away. “That did not just happen.”

“She was always a trifle showy. Are you okay?”

“Fine, it just surprised me, that’s all. What happened? How did it just crumble like that?”

“Wards and talismans can do pretty much anything if you can put the time and effort into making them,” Donald replied. “So let’s see what she left you after all that.”

“You don’t even know?”

“No clue,” he said, shaking his head.

I looked down, there was a small object wrapped in tissue paper now sitting on the table where the box had been. I was torn between asking what, exactly, a ward was, but figured it could wait, so I carefully unwrapped the object and set aside the paper. We both stared at it for a moment.

“It’s an egg.” I was finding myself rather unimpressed after the whole disappearing box trick.

“A blue egg, to be specific,” said Donald. “At least that’s what it looks like to me.”

I picked it up; it didn’t feel hollow, and it seemed a little heavier than I expected. I held it up to the light and it didn’t seem like any light got through, so it must have been solid all the way through. It didn’t feel like wood or stone, but it didn’t feel like an egg either. It wasn’t really an egg, it was just sort of egg shaped, and a very deep blue.

“Dark blue, right?” I asked.

He nodded, knowing I was color blind.

I gently brought it to my ear and shook it. No sound emerged.

I set it down, stumped. “Well, if possible, I would like an explanation now.”

“Let me do one more thing,” said Donald, taking the egg. He closed his eyes, seeming to concentrate. “No,” he said, finally, “if it has power I can’t detect it. But then I’m not very good at it, and it could have been shielded.”

“Now what are you talking about?”

He set the egg down and looked at me. I didn’t notice how, instead of rolling one way or the other like a normal egg would have, this one stayed right in the same spot Donald had set it. “The time has come to tell you about your heritage,” he began. “Guess I’ll just jump right into it. You’ve never felt quite right living here, have you? I know you haven’t, it’s a dumb question. What if I told you there was a reason for that?”

“I’m really from another planet?” I said, rolling my eyes. “Or maybe a wizard?”

“Close. You’re an Artificer. Like me you have certain abilities that most people don’t. In your case, you can use your spiritual energy to create objects of great power.”

“Come off it!”

“I’m serious. You saw that box, didn’t you? You could have gotten the chainsaw out of the garage and gone at it all night, and all you would have had at the end of it was a really dull chainsaw blade.”

I glared at the egg as though it was the cause of all the troubles in the world, and started to hope, just a little, that this whole thing wasn’t some elaborate birthday prank.

“So why am I only hearing about all this now?”

“A couple of reasons. First, you’re old enough to keep the secret that there are powers in the world and that you yourself have them. Second, those powers are awaking in you now that you are growing up, so it’s time to start your training. And third because your parents, before they disappeared, gave me orders not to.”

“And my mother gave you this... egg?”

“That’s right. She came to me one afternoon and said she and your father had to go away. She couldn’t tell me why when I asked, and left you with me, along with this box. I thought maybe she was just a little frazzled in raising her first child, and that she would be back in a few days. But she didn’t, and when I checked out the box I found I couldn’t open it. Now that you have, and it’s just this weird egg thing, I’m even more puzzled. I mean, it’s not a keepsake, it has no value for you because it’s just a thing. A keepsake holds a memory, and I assume you have no memory of this blue egg?” He waited for me to shake my head. “So it’s a

puzzle, maybe one only you can solve as you grow in power. And grow in power you will, because of your father.”

“My father had power too? What could he do?”

“A little of everything.”

I stared at him for a moment, but he said no more. “That’s not an answer,” I said slowly.

“Suffice to say for now that you’re very gifted in the power department. Study long and hard the next twenty years or so, and there will be nothing on this earth that could take you down. He only learned of his power after watching your mother make things, and deciding to help her out. She was making a bunch of piddly, identical wards as I understand it, and so he, as a joke, started imitating her. She was telling him exactly what to do with *Spirit Energy* to make it work. Imagine their surprise when it actually worked for him. They looked into it and found out he could basically learn any skill that didn’t depend on knowing other skills. That’ll make sense later, don’t get hung up on that. Anyway, they traveled around a little talking to various people with powers and he picked up a few things. You, on the other hand, will go to school and learn whatever you want, and become way better than your mother and father combined, because you can do things neither of them can.”

“I... rather like the sound of that,” I said, smiling.

“I thought you might.”

We both paused, looking down at the egg.

“So my mother could make things? Like what?”

“Like impossible to open boxes that crumble to dust, or swords that can kill demons, or bullets that can knock over buildings. And wards, basically just paper with symbols written on them that, when activated, accomplish something specific and then burn up, like you saw.”

“Back up— demons?”

“Oh yes. Why do you think they call the school ‘Demongate High’? It’s not just a name.”

This was a lot to take in. “How do you know all this?”

“Because after the disappearance of your parents, the Foundation—they’re the people that run the school— well, the whole world really, tried to track them down. Believe me, their resources are vast and varied. When that failed, they asked if I would take you in, and as your parents had asked me the same thing before they disappeared, I agreed it was the right thing to do. Certain things were explained to me when I came into my power, if you’ll call it that.”

“That’s right, you did say you had powers. What can you do?”

“The story of how I became touched with supernatural power is not something I like to relate. It happened much later in my life, as I didn’t inherit power like you did. Quite honestly it was forced on me, and at a terrible cost. It wasn’t something I chose. As for what I can do, it’s not all that useful in the long run. In any case, I agreed not to exercise it and the Foundation agreed to let me continue living here instead of moving to the island where the school is. Not much call for my talents there, you understand. No, this is about you and what you want for the future, not me. You’re being handed the opportunity of a lifetime. Schooling with kids your age who are also awakening their own power. The opportunity to “crack the egg” so to speak and find how it relates to your parents.

For all I know your mother didn’t make it, she only protected it and passed the duty of protecting it onto you. But in that case I hope she would have told me that before she left, so that I could have taken greater precautions. Why did she leave so quickly, and why couldn’t she tell me why? Why did her husband go with her, but not her only son? Perhaps even more important than that, attend Demongate High to become a true power in the battle with Hell that rages on earth to this very day.”

“That’s impossible, someone would have noticed!”

“Well, I say rages, maybe simmers is a better word. Demons and magic users and those that misuse their gifts are all around us, make no mistake. The world needs people of courage, and talent and fortitude to make sure this old earth keeps turning according to plan.”

“And you’re saying that’s me?”

“It can be, if you let them train you. You can refuse, of course, and just turn your back on the whole thing. Go to a normal high school here in Indiana, with perfectly normal people, and do perfectly normal things. We put the egg away, you never learn how to create magical items or throw energy blasts or use Alchemy or request the aid of the spirits or call demons to fight for you or any of it. That way is safer, I won’t lie to you.”

“I could do all that?”

“It’s like I said, you won’t lack in the- well, you won’t lack in the versatility department, let’s put it that way. In your case, you’ll never be able to do most of those things well unless you devote your life to nothing but learning. Normally just mastering a single type of power takes a lifetime; you could conceivably master them all.” He smiled a sad smile. “And you have the time, there’s nothing to say you can’t make

yourself ageless, one way or the other, so that kind of time might be nothing to you, if you choose to take that route.”

I was stunned. That kind of power was inside me? Is that why I never felt I fit in around here?

“So you’re saying that, basically anything I could think of doing, somehow, some way, after going to school at this Demongate place, I could probably find a way to do it? Living forever sounds good for a start. How about getting rich? Maybe save a princess or two from ancient castles?”

Donald nodded, smiling. “Go for the old standards, that’s the ticket. Seriously though, to answer your question, yes, all that and more. You don’t have to decide now, of course. Read over the student handbook, mull it over. You have time yet.” He got up and went into the other room, bringing out a tattered old book with “student handbook” embossed in gold letters on the cover. He handed it to me and stepped back. “Whatever you decide, I’ll stand behind it. You’re a decent kid, you know? A little quiet, but smart, willful, good with your hands. I’ve seen those models you made, you have an eye for detail that’ll be important for an Artificer, should you choose to become one. Sleep on it. Take a walk. Whatever. It’s your future, and right now many doors are open to you. I’ll even train you in watch making if that’s what you want, and you can carry on my business here. But if you want my opinion, your future is right here.” He tapped on the blue symbol at the top of the letter. “You stick this place out four years, put the effort in, and I’ll bet you anything you can go anywhere in the world, name your price, and you’ll get it. Now go on, get out of here. I have to wash up these dishes. Happy birthday.”

“Thanks— dad.”

“Not a problem— son.”

I gathered the book, papers and egg up in my arms and went to my room to flip through the pages. I couldn’t stop glancing at the egg, resting atop my dresser and thinking about the mystery it represented. There was really no question in my mind; I was attending Demongate High.

2

Arrival

When you meet a brand new friend, it opens up a world

I think I got a little taste, on the way to the school, of what it was like to be a secret agent. It was one airport after another once my father and I said goodbye and I worked my way east toward the coast. From there, it was one rather exciting plane ride to the island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. He had one last surprise for me as we parted at the first airport; five hundred dollars cash!

“Creating talismans is kind of expensive,” he explained. “If you want to make your own, you’ll need to buy the supplies, so that’s what this is for, okay? Make me proud.”

I told him I would, and promised to write him about all the cool stuff I made, hugged him once more, and was on my way.

At every stop I would sit and wonder, that kid over there looks to be my age. Is he going to Demongate? What about that short-skirted girl there who was walking so funny? Like she has weights on her feet or something. I was nervous, and excited, and everywhere I looked I imagined what weird powers the people around me had. Oh, I knew that only a small fraction of the world’s population actually had powers, for one reason or another. It was highly unlikely anyone here did, but it was fun to imagine. I figured as I got closer to the place the final plane would leave from, the higher the chances I would see people with real powers.

I was pleasantly surprised when the girl (she was Asian) in the skirt with the heavy legs followed me to the final plane, meaning my suspicions about her were correct. She kept looking at me too, meaning she had noticed my noticing her, and sat down beside me silently.

Apparently the Foundation owned this jet, as an announcement was made when we were in the air. Apparently, anyone on this plane was in some way connected to the school or the Foundation, and that we could talk freely to each other. I wasn’t sure how to strike up a conversation with this girl sitting next to me, but I perked up when the stewardess also announced any “Unseen” (whatever that was) wards could now be removed.

“Finally,” the girl next to me said, with an accent, looking down at her legs. She seemed to put her hand over her leg and ripped something off, and a heavy boot appeared to cover it! I jerked backwards and saw a flash as the piece of paper in her hand burned away.

“It was a ward!” I blurted out. “That is so cool.”

She turned to me and smiled. “Oh, you know about them?”

“Only a little, I’m an Artificer, or at least I’m going to be.”

“I guess you can’t see them, then?”

“What, the boots? No, didn’t that ward make them invisible?”

“It said in my packet they would become ‘Unseen’ not invisible. Normal people can’t see them, but people like us should be able to. But that takes some exposure to Unseen things or something, I guess. I couldn’t see them either, but sometimes I almost thought I could. It was weird. I thought you could see them because you kept looking at me, so...”

“I was looking at you because you were walking funny.” I said. A second too late I realized maybe I shouldn’t have said that in quite that way? But she laughed. She had a nice laugh.

“I should have known. Wearing them like this was weird. I could feel them, but not see them, and they’re heavy, you know? And I was trying to keep my speed down to regular walking speed at the same time, which I haven’t had any practice in. That’s probably why. Were you playing ‘guess who’s going to Demongate’ too?”

Now it was my turn to laugh. “Yes, I was. I’m glad I wasn’t the only one. Why not just carry them?”

“Oh, that wouldn’t have resulted in any uncomfortable questions at all, right?”

“I guess you’re right. How did you get through security, though? They would still set off metal detectors, right?”

“Gee, I don’t know! Maybe the ward took care of that too? Must have, I guess.” She seemed to think for a moment, then shrugged and started feeling around on her other leg.

“Wait, don’t pull the other one off yet.” I said, holding up a hand.

“You want to try and see it, am I right?”

“That’s right. Now that I know it’s there...” I looked down at her legs. Then I reddened, “Oh my gosh, it looks like I’m just staring at your legs doesn’t it? I mean, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to, that is, what I mean to say-”

She laughed again. “It’s okay. Feel it. Go on.”

I hesitantly brought my hand down to her leg, and sure enough, there was another iron boot running up the whole leg just like on the other side. I knocked it with a knuckle. "It's there all right. Why can't I see it? Wait! No, it's gone again."

"I'm the same way. I get little flashes. Anyway, I'd like to take them off if that's okay with you."

"Sure, sure!" I answered, pulling my hand back. Feeling around she tore off another ward, which burned away in her hand as soon as she held it up. She stood up and worked her way out of the boots; they really went up her whole leg, more like the bottom half of a suit of armor than just regular boots, then stood them up in between us. She stretched her legs out with a sigh.

"That's much better."

I wasn't sure what to say, so I just looked around the plane. I saw a couple of swords, and what looked like some Cambions now sitting in chairs where normal looking kids had sat before.

"I'm Yamashita, by the way," she said, holding out a hand.

"Right! I'm Dean. Say yours again?"

"Ya-ma-shi-ta," she said exaggerating it. "Though I guess I should get used to using my first name rather than my family name. It feels weird not to be using honorifics and first names and all that. So call me Yasui. That's easier, right?"

"Yasui, I guess so. So you're..."

"Japanese. Though my mom was Chinese. So I'm half-and-half. How about you?"

"Red blooded American. At least I guess. My mom and dad, well, it's a long story."

"Oh." she said, and was quiet for a minute.

"So you're-"

"So are-"

"Sorry." We both said, and laughed. I was beginning to like this girl. How about that?

"Go ahead."

"Well, I was going to say, are they just armor or do they have special properties?"

"The boots? Oh, they make me faster at the very least. Didn't I say that? And I can jump way higher in them too. And I guess I can use them to stand on air, but I don't know how to do that yet."

"Wow, I'd like to see that!"

“Maybe when we land.”

We laughed again.

“So you’re an... Inheritor then?” I asked, struggling to remember what the packet I received had said about other students I would meet.

“Technically I’m a True Martial Artist from my father’s side, but the boots are actually Chinese and they came from my mother’s side.”

“Gee, all I got from my Mom was an *Invulnerable* cardboard box with a blue egg inside. And I didn’t even get to keep the box, it burned all up.”

“Are you serious?” she asked.

“Like I said, it’s a long story.”

“I guess it must be.”

“Just think, long ago in history one of your ancestors asked an Artificer like me to make him some armored boots, and so he did. Now you get to wear them today. Say, wait a minute.” I said, looking at her.

“What?”

“Won’t you, well, grow? I mean, the boots fit now, right? But will you be able to wear them when you graduate?”

“My mom wore them just yesterday, and she’s taller than I am right now.”

I looked at them again, marveling, and shaking my head. “Amazing. So what did you want to ask me?”

“Oh, just that you were an Artificer, right? I guess that means you make stuff?”

“Yup. See all the swords and that weird staff thing carried by that kid over there? Each one the work of an Artificer at some point in history. At least, that’s what I read anyway.”

“Wow, that sounds really useful. I just kick stuff, and you could probably make my boots to boot.”

“Well, sure, maybe, but if you got caught without your boots you could still fight, right? If I got caught without the stuff I made beforehand, I’d be sunk!”

“I guess you’re right. So did you get your powers from your mom or your dad, or don’t you know?”

“I guess my mom was the Artificer. My dad, well, he found out later he had all the powers.”

“All the powers?” she echoed, confused.

“Yeah, like I said-”

“It’s a long story-” we both said, and laughed again.

“At least you can laugh about it, I guess,” she remarked when we got ahold of ourselves again.

“I honestly don’t know what to think about the whole situation. I mean, there I was living my life, and suddenly Donald, that’s the guy who’s taken care of me, hands me this packet and box and my life is turned upside down.”

“I can’t even imagine that,” said Yasui. “I mean, I’ve always known about powers in a general way because of my parents, but to just find out one day,” she started looking at my forehead.

“No, I don’t have a scar,” I said, laughing.

“Just checking,” she said, smiling. “I think you have to now, because of you-know-who.”

“Anyway, they aren’t dead. At least, I don’t think they are. Just... well, missing, I guess you’d say. Look, I’ll show you.”

I rummaged around in my carry on bag and came out with the egg. I wasn’t afraid of it breaking, some careful testing on my part showed that it was, like the box it came in, immune to anything I could do to it.

“What a pretty blue,” Yasui exclaimed. “That’s what your mom left you, huh?”

“Yup. Just something to remember her by, or a clue to where she went? Right now I can’t say.”

“Well, I hope you find out.”

“Thanks.” I put the egg away.

“So you were saying about your dad? I mean, if you don’t mind talking about it?”

And you know what? I didn’t. I told her what Donald had told me about my father being able to learn the basics of every power, and how he never attended Demongate because he didn’t “register” to Seers, whatever that meant. She listened attentively, and sat back in her chair after my story was done.

“What an amazing story.”

“Really? I mean, they couldn’t have left me a note? Why this egg business?”

“Maybe they’re on some secret mission and they couldn’t!”

“For this long? Anyway, for who? The Foundation or whatever? They could have told me.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Still, they think you can do the same thing as your dad? Learn a little bit of every power?”

“That’s what the letter said. Don’t know how they know that, but

I'm on a plane heading for a secret island in the middle of the ocean next to a Japanese girl and surrounded by weird looking kids. Right now I'll believe anything."

"Yeah, I'm kinda glad you're nice and normal looking. I mean, I might be able to get used to someone having horns or wings or goat legs or whatever. Right now I think I would have just freaked out if the person next to me changed like that."

"I know what you mean. I, uh, I don't usually talk to people this much, you know?"

"Neither do I. I'm pretty shy, actually. It's weird, it's like I've known you forever. I can't imagine why I think that though."

"You're right-" I said, looking at her more closely. *Have I seen her before, somewhere?* "It does seem that way, doesn't it? I wonder why?"

And in just that way, the plane ride to the island passed in a flash. We compared schedules, and wondered what our teachers would be like, and just... talked. She seemed really nice, and honestly I had expected to just sit in silence on the way there like I usually did, but talking was... nice. It seemed I had made a friend in an unexpected place, and that made the prospect of being away from home a little easier to take.

Everyone crowded around one side of the plane as the island came into view, until they made us all sit down for the landing. We were met by several teachers and older students, and loaded into buses for the 4km journey from Porta to the school itself. We now had several days to get over our jet lag, explore the school and learn where things were, and in general hang out before classes officially started. I knew where I was going to be spending most of that time- the library. As we all approached the building it seemed pretty normal, but then it was awfully late so it was getting dark. I promised to meet Yasui for lunch the next day at least, and went to go find my room.

I was met there by a boy my age unpacking a suitcase. The first thing I noticed was the sunglasses he was wearing. At night. He had black hair, and was a bit more muscular than I was, I thought. He was slightly taller too, but there was something delicate looking about him that I couldn't place. Those sunglasses though...

Who exactly am I rooming with? I thought.

Still, he stuck his hand out and introduced himself right away.

"So you are my, how do you say, roommate, yes? It is nice to be meeting you. I am Osman, let me know if you need help to unpack." He spoke with what I assumed was a Russian accent, my only clue being all

those James Bond movies I had watched with my foster father.

“Thanks,” I answered. “I’m Dean, nice to meet you too.”

“You were sitting next to pretty girl on plane, no? The one with the boots?”

“That’s right.”

“Ah, I thought so. I see very well, you know? Your energy, it is not like the others. I am thinking you are special in some way, yes?”

“I’m surprised you see anything with those glasses on.”

“Many say this to me. The glasses, they are, how you say, so that you are not becoming upset, yes?”

“Why would I become upset?”

“I suppose it is better to show you now, after all, we are roommates, no? For you, I will show,” he said, taking the glasses off. I began to see what he meant. He had eyes, they just didn’t have any color, or pupil in the middle- they were just a solid light purple color.

“Oh. I see,” I remarked, wondering what else I should say.

“At least there was not the screaming. I hate the screaming.” He put the glasses back on.

“Yes, I think the glasses are best. At least for a while, until I get used to Cambions and things walking around the halls. Are you...”

“No, I am what they call Petitioner, so I am very far from being a demon.” He saw my confused look. “I can bring angel to Earth temporarily, like a Summoner can bring the demon.”

“Wow, really? That’s amazing! I wonder if I could do that.”

“No you must be- one moment.”

I looked at him curiously, as he seemed to be listening to someone over his shoulder.

Now what? I thought. Staying here is certainly going to be interesting, isn’t it?

“My sister was asking me something based on what I saw inside you, and yes, that is what it looks like, exactly. What does it mean?”

He listened again, while I thought *His sister? There’s an invisible person in this room, right now?*

“She wants to know if the name Cain means anything to you.”

“Who does? Is there someone else here?” I looked around.

“Oh, excuse me, yes, I did not explain properly.” He seemed to pause as if listening again, and it seemed like he was reciting something now. “Being a Petitioner, I had been granted an angel to protect and guide me, an angel of knowledge. Sadly, due to certain circumstances of

my birth, the soul of my sister went in his place. So when it was time for my angel to attach himself to my soul, he found my sister already there. Not wishing to kill her, he gave her his knowledge so I would still have use of it, and returned to Heaven. So rather than an angel, my ESPer sister protects me instead. She says that perhaps you are related to this Cain in some way, and that is why I see traces of many different powers inside you.”

“Wait, what? I’m sorry, that’s a lot to take in at once. What are you saying?”

He sighed and sat down. “I thought my sister explaining it would be more of the clear. I am starting at the beginning. I was supposed to be twins. One girl, one boy. The girl was to be ESPer and I was to be Petitioner. But something happened, my body took over hers, and we became one body. This is called, how do you say in your language...” he listened again. “Thank you, Kat. Chimera. When this happens, normally the soul of the unborn child is given to another mother so it is not lost, but this time my soul was waiting for my angel to attach itself. So she went there, instead. The power is attached to the soul, you know, not the body. So angel comes down when I am born to begin to protect me, and he finds that space filled! Is very strange to him, he does not know what to do. He thinks, maybe ESPer can protect me better than he could, this is maybe plan? So he talks to bosses in Heaven, and they say, give knowledge to child and see what happens. If no works out, soul can be taken back and you can start duties. So he did. With no body, Kat put all time into figuring out powers, so I talk to her all the time. My parents, they worry my “invisible friend” is all in my mind, angel should not talk to me until later in life. Finally she learns enough to make herself seen by them, and demands name. I had always called her “cat” so they named her Katrina. So she looks out for me, and I am protecting us both, yes? Is that more clear for you?”

“Yes, that’s amazing. So, what, you have her liver or something?”

“Something like that, yes. We share this body, as some of it is me and some of it is her. But mine is dominant.”

“Isn’t it kind of, I don’t know, awkward to have a girl riding around in your head?”

“She has been there all my life. Is no big deal now.”

“I guess. So can I see her?”

Suddenly, a form appeared to detach itself from Osman’s body and take a step in front of him. It was like looking at a ghost, and I could

only stare. They were twins, there was no mistake, as there was a certain resemblance between them. She was quite pretty, if hard to see exactly, and only a few inches shorter than her brother. She didn't really have color but her hair was long and straight, and I wondered if she had any conscious control over her appearance. After all, technically she didn't have a body anymore. I realized I was staring.

"Um, oh, hello. Nice to meet you, Katrina."

She smiled and turned, going back inside Osman. I heard a "voice" inside my head.

Nice to meet you too, Dean. Don't worry, I won't peep on you. Much.

"She spoke to me!" I exclaimed, fascinated.

"Yes, is hard for her to use two powers at once, so she usually only does one thing at a time for now. She is getting better though. We make good team."

"I'm an only child, I can't imagine how it must be, to be that close to someone else that you literally exist inside them. And she, I mean, Katrina, you act totally independently of him?"

I sure do. I see what he sees and hear what he hears unless I'm projecting, but I can't do that for long without dying. I'll hang out and watch his back when I have to. Otherwise I can use my powers just like I want, when I want, so it's pretty convenient, given the circumstances. He can call on angels and I can keep him safe while he does it. I think we'll make a great team. Oh, thanks for addressing me directly, Dean, even my own family likes to pretend I don't exist. They figure their son was supposed to get an angel, so an angel he should have gotten. We weren't sure how people would react, so we thought we should keep it a secret. Guess we shouldn't have worried.

"I would rather know the truth, and if you ever want to talk, I'm here for you. It must be pretty boring all the time, not being seen or heard unless you use your powers."

It is inconvenient, so thanks. You're a nice guy.

"So we're okay?" asked Osman hesitantly.

"Sure." I said, realizing he was all right. "It wasn't your fault what happened to your sister, and she is still alive, in a way, so what's there to be concerned about?" He looked relieved and made good on his offer to help me unpack. As we did, I thought that this day had been much different from what I had thought it was going to be, and that wasn't bad, no, that wasn't bad at all.

“Say,” I wondered, “how come she seems to speak way better English than you do?”

“She has knowledge of angel, which includes English,” he replied. “She practice it in her head more than I did.”

I looked confused, she didn't have a head.

He means I did more thinking in English than he did, that's all, so I'm better at it.

I nodded, understanding.

So today, I thought, finishing up unpacking, I met a girl in boots, a boy with weird eyes who talks to his half dea- no wait- his alive sister. From her I got a possible clue about my past to ask someone about later- the man named Cain.

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