

WARRIOR CHILDREN



THE IMMORTALS SERIES

SONS OF THE RED PLANET

VAUGHN EDWARD

PROLOGUE

“EDWARD, SPARE HIM!” GENE SCREAMED SO LOUD, his voice echoed off the buildings on both sides.

“Really? Really, Gene?! Clueless! And why? Cause you’re too damn merciful! You and your father! You’re just like him, and it’s seriously pissing me off!” The point of Edward’s knife blazed into an immaculate violet flare, with the tip at the forehead of his prize. “Your kindness precedes you when this mortal should perish! At least let him die in honor, knowing his life force was stripped by MY HANDS! If I die, HE DIES!”

“And for what? This battle’s already done, and the death toll’s at an all-time high! He’s a toy, Edward, a puppet of his master.” Gene calmed his voice and pleaded, using a small bit of his power of persuasion. “Spare him, Edward. Please. We’re not mercenaries. We’re protectors, in case you’ve forgotten. He may be on the side of our enemy, but our enemy is not humanity.”

Edward glared at him the moment he felt the sparkle of energy from Gene. “Seriously? You’re turning your power on me? You’re really trying to force me to change my mind, Gene?! That might work on mortals, but you’re outta your league on this one!”

Crazily, Edward stared at Gene, then at the battlefield and back to Gene again. His body was pumping with adrenaline, and his mind was racing in different directions. He closed his eyes for a few seconds, right before a wicked grin spread across his cheeks. Opening them back up, he raised his arm high into the air and prepared to thrust the knife into the heart of the mercenary in front of him.

Before he could make another move, a blast sent him flying fifteen feet backward. Gene was standing above him, between him and the injured mercenary. Edward's head was throbbing, and he was numb and dazed. He whispered, "Gene, how could you? Why would you do that to me?"

"He's right, Edward." Edward's head spun. There was a brilliant, golden ball, as bright as the sun, advancing toward him. He tried to sit up, but he slumped back to the ground. Kneeling, Christopher placed his hand on Edward's shoulder, which shocked Edward and rattled his body violently.

"It's one thing to kill a mortal out of defense, or out of defense for other mortals. But for a god to strip a mortal of his life force out of sheer contempt, it is the very epitome of hell, Edward." Christopher stared down at him.

Edward made another attempt, but he was unable to sit up. Staring at the ground, he mumbled nonsensically. "It's... it's so hard, when they look at us as gods, but we feel everything they feel. But we feel it more intensely. And this world. I would've done the world a favor by getting rid of this monster. Wouldn't that have displeased Moloch? I..."

Christopher unsheathed his sword and pointed it at Edward while he was still mumbling. "Sorry, Edward. This will hurt. A lot."

At that moment, there was a huge explosion a few hundred feet away. A lightning-fast figure blurred from the explosion. Within a few seconds, Aaron came to a halt next to Christopher. "No, Christopher. Leave this to me."

He unsheathed his Vel staff and aimed it at Edward. Slowly, Edward looked up, and his gaze was met by the end of the gleaming spear. A tear rolled down his cheek, and he whimpered softly, "Aaron?"

The next moment, Edward screamed in pain. His body felt like it was being shredded, as if tiny pieces of glass were entering into his skin and organs. His sight was blinded, and the world around him collapsed.

CHAPTER 1

Part I: Time to Leave 6 Days Before Winter Solstice

Lost in his own world, Caleb moved about, finding it difficult to keep up with daily chores and the menial life of the village. To his left, three women were scrubbing vegetables, while waiting for a large pot of water to boil. Behind him, five men were busy building a wooden fence to keep wild animals from roaming in inadvertently. A few boys, slightly older than him, were splitting logs and carrying handfuls of wood to a nearby shack.

It had only been a week since the two gods had come and gone. His thoughts were tugging at the notion of something new and exciting in a land he could not even imagine.

Nearly every moment, the words from Aaron, the son of Muruga, would slither in and out of his mind. *Second son of Muruga, you were destined this day to meet the first, and the first was destined this day to meet the second. As you wish, so shall it be.*

He stopped and stood in place, just thinking. The words of Aaron's father crept into his mind. *From this day on, you will carry the vibration known as Caleb Elliott. You will carry the same family name as your brother, whom you will meet in the coming days. I have empowered this new name for you so that a pathway can be made for you into the Western world.*

"Can it be that I'm really going insane? My brother? I am still stuck in this village, and I really do not know if things will ever turn for me." An hour felt like a day, and a day felt like a month.

The swirling vortex of energy, created by Aaron and Edward, was a powerful vibration in the midst of a once-was common village. Established so that it would harness the magicks of Muruga for the benefit of the entire world,

the vortex was summoned and constructed within Caleb's tiny village, right in the heart of the Himalayan Mountains.

At the end of a day's work, most in the village could be seen sitting inside the circle of the six golden trees, repeating the powerful and magickal word, given to them by the son of Muruga.

Night settled, and Caleb stood outside the vortex and watched a group of his fellow villagers who were enchanted by the Murugan magick. The humming sound of Saravanabava, the magickal word which Aaron had given to them, penetrated the atmosphere, as they chanted in unison. Never did he step foot inside and join them. He was always content to stand back and watch. Always, when they incanted, he felt a surge of electricity buzzing inside of him, almost as if they were calling to him, chanting his name. He was in a daze trying to figure it out.

Question after question fluttered through his mind. He was excited and doubtful. *Did any of this really happen?* He sighed.

"Child, you should step inside the circle and ask your questions." The voice resounded from the center of his head. He looked around, but saw nobody. An eerie feeling crept throughout his body, and he walked slowly to the edge of the invisible barrier of energy. He stepped inside the vortex, and immediately, the energy he had felt standing outside of it increased dramatically by ten-fold.

His head was spinning and tingling, and one by one, his thoughts subsided. He walked to the very center of the six trees and closed his eyes. Oblivious of the other villagers, he momentarily forgot who he was and where he was. The voice in his head then said, "Ask."

His body jolted, but his eyes remained closed. *Did any of this really happen? Am I just dreaming?*

“Child, when you anticipate your desires, you become drenched and locked within time. The only way to escape this mold is to become present, unaware of anything else but this moment.”

Caleb stood in place a few moments. Slowly he asked, “Who... who are you?”

“You are the second son of Muruga, and I am he. That which you call destiny, awaits you. Upon the opening of your eyes, pay silent homage to the peoples of this village. For every time my name is spoken, the energy increases for you and the entire world. As they chant my name, Saravanabava, so too do they chant your name.

“After doing so, pack lightly. Inform your parents, as of this day, you will no longer be residing in this village. Your karmic bonds with them have been dissolved, and they will allow you to leave gracefully. Speak the truth, and you will surely access the freedom which you desire.”

But, you should know, my parents will not let me leave.

“The bonds which kept you wrapped tightly with your parents have all been melted away by the first son of Muruga. There is but one option, and one option alone. That is, to leave. That is the only door available. It must be so.”

Where do I go? How am I supposed to leave?

He stood there for two minutes listening for an answer. Nothing. *And I'm going nuts.* He opened his eyes and turned to walk out of the circle of the six trees, then stopped and placed his hands firmly on his hips. “Fine.”

Breathing in and out slowly, he watched the group. He then lowered his head and stared at the ground for a bit. Lifting his eyes, he scanned the villagers, then let his eyes sink. *Thanks. I might be crazy, but thanks.* Then he ran out of the vortex and made a beeline toward his home.

The door creaked, and he dashed in, only to come to a halt, nearly running into his mother. Her long, black hair flopped in her face as she yelled

out, “Aaaahhh!” She creased her eyes and asked him, “What are you in a hurry for? Slow down!”

“I, uh, never mind.” He casually walked to a corner of the room where he slept. His home, just a one-room shanty, gave roof to him and his parents. His mother eyed him suspiciously and watched him stuff two shirts and a pair of pants onto a small blanket, then tie the corners together.

“What are you doing?” she asked sharply.

“I...” He didn’t know what to say and thought about lying.

The voice from earlier pounded into his head once more. “Speak the truth, and you will surely access the freedom which you desire.”

Caleb stood up and sagged a bit in front of his mother. Before he could speak, his father walked in the door. Eyeing the situation and feeling the tension in the room, he asked in a very stern manner, “What is going on?”

“I am waiting for an answer from him,” she replied coolly, pointing a finger at Caleb. “He has packed some clothes.”

“Out with it then,” his father demanded.

“Well, last week, you know that I spoke to that god, the one who called himself Aaron. I even held on tightly to that weapon of his.” He squirmed a little and paused.

“Go on,” said his father.

“I did not tell you everything. That day, I asked him to help me to leave this village so I can have an exciting life. I love you both, and I am grateful to this entire village for everything. Really, I am. And well, he even made me give thanks to everyone before he helped me. When I grabbed hold of that staff of his, I heard this voice talking to me. It told me that I was going to have a new home in some place in the Americas, wherever that is. I have never even heard of it.”

Again he faltered, sputtering his words. His father just nodded and said, "Go on."

"Well, and then Aaron or his father, one of the two, gave me a new name. They called me Caleb. Caleb Elliott. He told me it would be my new name for when I go to the Americas."

His heart was pounding and his head started to hurt, but he continued. "Um well, then tonight, I went inside of the circle of the six trees, and that voice came to me again. It told me to pack, because tonight I am supposed to leave. And that is the long and short of it." He was almost in tears, unsure if he was going to receive a scolding or whipping.

Both his parents stood in front of him quietly. Unable to take the silence, he screamed out, "Well?!"

His father breathed a long and heavy sigh and touched the elbow of his wife. He then turned to his son. His voice was quiet. "The past three nights, I have had a recurring dream. The young god who came to us last week has been in it each time. All three nights he has said the same thing to me. In the dream, he told me, 'You will have to let Caleb go. If you allow him to leave, then one day, he will be the grace of this village.' I thought that it was just a dream. I mean, I did not know of anyone named Caleb."

The tension in the room eased, and the silence was captivating. Finally, his mother chimed in, "How are you supposed to leave tonight? We cannot just let you wander aimlessly in the mountains. There are wild animals, and who knows what else?!"

Just then, they heard the squawking of a handheld horn outside. Peering out the front door, they saw two horses and a caravan rolling in. Caleb's eyes lit up, and he shouted, "There! I'm supposed to leave with them!" He ran outside with his packed clothes.

His parents were about to run after him, but as they took one step, an apparition appeared before them. It was a hazy figure with colors of red and gold, and it held the same weapon as the son of Muruga had held the previous week.

It spoke to them. "Do not be alarmed, and do not fear for your son. The events which have happened were pre-ordained and arranged by the gods. His luck will continue to grow, and he will continuously be provided for. The little coincidences which have taken place are merely a twist of the hand. Go now. He needs you this very moment."

The apparition disappeared, and his parents stared at each other for a few seconds, then ran outside to find their son.

Many of the villagers were lingering about. It was not every day that outsiders happened upon them. A man stepped out from the driver's side and waved to everyone. "Hello. I am on my way to the city. It is a very long way from here, and my wife and I are in need of any supplies. We have money, but it looks as though you are all completely self-sufficient and have no need of that. So we can only ask for a favor."

Quickly, the villagers hurried in different directions and loaded the caravan with enough food to last several nights to a week. After graciously thanking everyone, the man stepped back up into the driver's seat. Caleb's mother saw the expression of her son, as his face turned sour. He was too scared to ask, and they had not yet granted permission for him to leave.

She stepped in front of the caravan and waved for the man to come out again. Before the entire village, she stated, "What our village has done for you, we do without asking in return. But if I can now ask a favor of you? Please take my son with you. See to it that he arrives in the city. He is on his way to America, and this will just make it easier."

The man in the caravan looked to his wife for a moment, and she nodded. "Very well. We are honored to accompany him, and we will happily take him as far as we can. There is plenty of room for us all." He turned to Caleb and said, "Hop in."

Caleb was beaming. He ran to his mother and hugged her tightly, then did the same to his father. "I do love you, and I will never forget you. I promise!" His parents squeezed him tightly, and without knowing why they were doing what they were doing, they let him loose.

He then turned to face his entire village, and for a few seconds, he lapsed into a trance, while he was brought back to the moment when Aaron had spoken to him. He watched the scenario as if he was standing a few feet away.

He saw himself before the son of Muruga, and he clearly heard the words of Aaron, as he had spoken them previously. "Second son of Muruga, you were destined this day to meet the first, and the first was destined this day to meet the second. As you wish, so shall it be. When time opens, and the door swings wide for you to walk, look back once more and honor your parents. Give them hope in their time of loss. Tell them you will return someday. Tell the entire village, that when all seems lost, and despair is at its peak, that is when you shall return."

Caleb snapped out of his trance. His eyes were wide, and although he felt silly for saying it, he yelled out, "Someday, I will be back! I will come back and help! And ummm, when I do, when all seems lost, and despair is at its peak, THAT is when I will return!" *Wow. Now I feel stupid.* He turned to his parents once more and said, "Thank you mom and dad. I love you!"

Some of them jokingly laughed at his remark, and they waved goodbye to him. A young girl ran up to him and gave him a hug and kissed him

lightly on the cheek, causing him to blush. Then he jumped into the back of the caravan and watched the village disappear into the night.

Part II: Away from Home

“What is your name, son?”

“Caleb, sir. Caleb Elliott.”

“Caleb? Your name is not from the East.”

He quickly thought of an answer. “My parents know people from the Americas who have a son named Caleb. They liked it so much and named me after him. That is where I am going, to them. So uh, there will be two of us. Two Calebs,” he added, trying to sound convincing. *What? Oh man. I didn't just say that.* He sighed to himself.

“I see. Why are you heading to the West? Schooling?”

A bit unsure of what to say, he blurted out, “I... Yes. They want me to attend school there, and they told me that everything is already set up for me.”

“I see. How old are you?”

“I am fifteen, sir.”

“So you will be entering into high school then? That sounds very exciting.”

“Yes. I will be going to high school in the Americas.” *What?? All I have to do is get to the city. This conversation really has to stop now.*

“We live in the city. It should not take too long to reach civilization.” He chuckled to himself. Thinking for a bit, he asked, “Are you supposed to meet somebody in the city?”

“Uh, yes. I am.” Caleb twisted his lip.

“Do you know where? When we get to our car, I am not going to just drop you off anywhere.”

“Sir, as long as you get me out of the mountains, I will be fine. I have been there before, and I know exactly where to go.” Not wanting to be questioned any longer, he asked, “Do you mind if I sleep? I am just really tired.”

“No, of course not. Sleep.”

Caleb leaned back and stared at the ceiling of the caravan, shifting his eyes to the outside every now and then while pretending to be asleep. He was too anxious, excited and scared about the future to sleep. *At least I am out of the village. That is a start.*

Finally, after two hours, sleep won over. Several hours later, he awoke to the sounds of metal clanking together. The caravan had stopped, and the couple was preparing food. A small fire was lit, and the morning sun had just risen.

“You are finally awake.” She smiled warmly and handed him a paper plate with a mound of rice, topped with a soupy dish of sliced potatoes and lentils. “I know it is not much, but when we get to the city, we can treat you to a really nice lunch or dinner, complete with desserts.”

“Oh no, this is fine. Thank you. I am not used to having much anyway. In the village, we do not eat like princes. It is just, well, stuff like this.” *Oh wait, that did not come out right.* “I mean, this looks really good, and I am used to eating this kind of food.”

She grinned at him and nodded. “Well then, it looks like we have something to look forward to when we do get to the city. A nice meal, and then you can be on your way.”

“Ummm, okay, deal. You are really nice, by the way. And if I did not say it before, thank you both for taking me.” A few thoughts quickly passed through his mind, some of which were about Aaron and his father. “And if there is something I can do for you to pay this debt off later on, then I will do it.”

She put her hand on his shoulder. "You were raised right, but you have no debt to us. Remember? Your village helped us out. So fair is fair."

"She is right. No arguments on this one." Her husband cheerfully walked around the caravan and sat down. "You owe us nothing. We will be in Delhi in no time at all. When we reach there, we will feed you, and then make sure you safely meet your chaperone."

Caleb tilted his head, then slowly shook it up and down. "Okay. Then we are even. That is very kind of you, sir. Thank you." He turned around and grimaced a bit. *Just wait til they find that nobody is there to meet me.*

Part III: Across the World in a Blink of an Eye
New York, Mid-December

Casually strolling down 42nd Street, he whistled a tune to himself, merely out of pure joy. A wide grin spread across his face, and he breathed in the buzz of a city like no other in the world. He followed no path, nor the swarms of people who were walking in various directions. Instead, he zipped from corner to corner and window to window, peering at anything and everything that caught his fancy.

Dressed to a tee in modern, form-fitting fashion, donning the colors of black, red and white, with sleek pants and his collar popped up, he stopped in front of a window and gazed at his reflection. His smile broadened. Then he sighed and shifted his backpack so that it hung on the other shoulder. *Soak up the fun now before leaving for the world of complete and utter silence.*

He turned and saw a street performer who was juggling six tennis balls. The smile returned to his face. He stood mesmerized. "Now that's magick! And while it's freezing cold!" *So much to see, so much to do.* "I'm thinking, this planet really should be my home." He walked toward the performer and tossed a ten-dollar bill in his bucket.

After milling around for several hours, hopping from bus to bus and from train to train, he found himself somewhere in the middle of Queens. By this time, the sun had already dimmed, and the night sky welcomed the city lights in all directions. "Food. I definitely need some. I haven't eaten anything all day." *Ah, well, except that coffee. Is that considered food, Father?*

No Answer.

He walked into a café and placed an order for a falafel sandwich and a salad. When the waitress asked what he wanted to drink, he merely said, "Surprise me." A few seconds passed by and the waitress hadn't moved. "Yes,

really. Surprise me. I just want my food. And whatever else, well that's just a bonus. So there you go."

A few minutes later, she returned with an orange soda, a root beer float and a coffee. "Now that's what I'm talking about!" He was clearly overjoyed.

She gave him a sarcastic look. "Right. I would've brought you a beer, but yeah, it'd be a waste of my time to even ask for your ID."

He eyed her incredulously. "What you mean? I've had a beer before."

"Pppffh." It came out as a loud exhale, and she turned around. "Your food'll be out in two minutes."

"What?" Then he realized. *Oh yeah, right. I totally forgot. I'll look under age even two thousand years from now.* He giggled to himself.

After his meal, he stood on the street, staring at a clock inside the window of another restaurant. *Two hours, thirty-two minutes, and twelve seconds.* "What to do until then?" he voiced aloud to himself.

Silently, he explored the neighborhood, mindlessly walking through alleys, side streets and sometimes through buildings, from the entrance and finding his way to the back doors. In one such building, he looked at the clock again. *Eleven minutes and forty-three seconds to go.* "Hmmm, I killed that much time off?"

He slipped out the back door of the building and stood in the parking lot for a moment before entering an alley. Looking at both ends of the alley, he was trying to decide if he should go left or right. *As if it matters.*

He mentally checked off his to-do list. *Get the boy. Bring him to the others. Find rocks. Throw 'em around the planet. Come back. Have fun.*

A big grin spread across his face as he thought of having fun. *And blow some shit up with Edward.*

His thoughts of fun were halted, when a voice rang out, “Yo! Lookie what we got here! Uh oh! Looks like someone turned down the wroooong street!” And then, laughter.

Aaron rolled his eyes when he saw two guys walking toward him, and four coming from the parking lot he had just left. He hollered out, loud enough for them all to hear. “Damn. You totally ruined my happy thoughts. Really though, I don’t have time for this. I’m on a schedule.”

“Hear that, Tone? We ruined his happy thoughts. And the boy’s on a schedule.”

The one addressed as Tone spoke out. “Should’ve thought of that before, pretty boy. Way you’re dressed, I’m bettin’ mom ‘n dad sent you away with a heavy pocket. What’s in the backpack?”

If not demons, humans. All I wanted was a good night. “Ummm, you really don’t wanna know what’s in there. And I don’t have a mom. I’m actually the son of a great god whom I call, Father. So I guess you can say, my dad did send me away with something. But I’m just letting you know, you really don’t wanna know what’s in my bag.”

“I thought about letting you off with just a few stabs and broken bones,” Tone said, “but since you opened your mouth, you’re not gonna walk or even crawl away.”

Tone took one step, but before he came any closer, Aaron had already unzipped his bag and stuck his hand inside. The moment his hand went inside the backpack, Tone and two others drew guns, while another pulled out a knife with a five-inch blade.

When he saw the guns, Aaron’s arm moved at blinding speed, as he withdrew it from the backpack. In a split-second, the Vel staff in his hand grew to over five feet in height, while emitting a searing light that filled the entire alley.

In a frenzy, Tone pulled the trigger. A loud echo rang through the alley from the gunshot.

“What the...?”

Aaron cut Tone off. “I told you, you didn’t wanna know what was in my backpack. And no, I wasn’t lying about my father.” The bullet was suspended in mid-air one foot away from Aaron. He hadn’t moved. Nor did he flinch.

Tone pulled the trigger once more. Again, the bullet stopped one foot away from Aaron.

“Look...” Aaron took a deep breath and stared hard at Tone. “I’m not here to fight. If you leave now, you will all remain unscathed.”

He reached out, grasped both bullets, and stuck them in his pocket. He eyed them quickly and spotted a silver watch on one of them. “Before you leave, I’ll be taking all your weapons, and your watch.” He pointed at the one with the watch on his wrist.

They were all speechless. Aaron added, “No need to go searching through your pockets. I’ll take them from here. Well, except the watch. You will happily take that off your wrist and toss it to me.”

He slammed the base of his staff into the ground and emitted a power that started to magnetize the weapons to him. The guns slipped out of their hands, and another gun came sliding out from the pants of another.

The one with the five-inch blade could not hold on to his knife. It too was wrenched from his hands, along with two other blades from the others. All the weapons floated toward him and gently lowered to the ground at his feet.

“Now. That watch?” Aaron held out his hand. “Please hurry. I distinctly remember telling you all that I was on a schedule, and I need to know how much time I have.”

In a very speedy and nervous manner, the guy slipped the watch from his wrist and threw it to Aaron. He looked at the time. *Two minutes and twelve seconds*. “Is this watch dead on?”

“Ye- yeh,” the guy stammered. “It’s right on time.”

“Good. You can all leave now. And I really do mean right now. I need to scam and do my thing.” Aaron pointed his staff at the weapons. A burst of light shot out and disintegrated the guns and the blades. When that happened, all six of them turned tail and ran off.

Aaron glanced at the watch again. *Thirty-eight seconds*. He closed his eyes while gripping the Vel staff tightly. The air around him swirled, and tiny particles of light shot out from both his staff and his body. A crackle of thunder in the sky, and he disappeared, leaving the alley dark and quiet.

Part IV: Teacher and Student. Brother to Brother.

The caravan rolled into Delhi, and the couple was met by a friend, who took the horses off their hands and had arranged for a cab. The couple, along with Caleb, piled into the cab, which took them further into the city.

The husband turned to Caleb. "We will get some food first. You were telling me earlier that your chaperone will be in the inner city of Delhi?"

Caleb fidgeted a bit and said, "Yes. I can get there if I just see some of the neighborhoods. I will be able to recognize it, and he is expecting me." *Maybe I can just run off and lose them. They are nice and all, but what to do.*

"Very well." He turned to his wife, placed his hand on her knee and asked, "How about Prakash's restaurant?" She nodded, and he gave the cab driver the address of the restaurant. He turned to Caleb and said, "We are going to the restaurant of a good friend of ours. The food is very good there."

An hour and a half passed, and Caleb was completely stuffed with food that he had never before eaten. Spicy dishes, rice dishes, and sweets which he had never heard of. *Man, I hope they have this stuff in the Americas.* Then the agitation hit. *Oh no. Now what?*

Standing on the side of the street outside the restaurant, the husband looked at Caleb. "It is a big city. Do you recognize any of this?"

Caleb wasn't prepared for an answer. His cheeks flushed, and he was trying hard to think of something to say. Just then, a voice called out from almost a block away. "Caleb! There you are! I'm so happy you made it here safely!"

Caleb's eyes widened. There was a dark-headed boy, dressed to the nines, walking toward them. The bold mixture of colors of black, red and white, and his obvious foreign origin stood out amongst everyone else on the street.

“I... uh,” Caleb managed to mutter. “Looks like we do not have to go anywhere. There is my chaperone now.”

Aaron cheerfully waltzed up to where they were standing and introduced himself. “Hullo. I’m Aaron. My father sent me to meet Caleb.”

The husband shook his hand and asked, “Of course. I was a bit worried about this whole thing. But it makes sense for an American to take him to the West. Where is your father now?”

“Oh. He is very busy. He’s off doing the fatherly stuff he does so well with his business. But he provided me with enough money and all the papers Caleb needs in order to travel.” Aaron pulled out a passport with Caleb’s photo on it, along with a handful of other documents that looked very official.

After inspecting them for a couple of minutes, the husband handed them back to Aaron, satisfied. “Well then, it looks like everything is set for you, Caleb. My wife and I can stop worrying about you, and you will soon be in the West attending school.”

Aaron smiled broadly at the couple. He gave a slight bow of his head and spoke to them very clearly and intently. “Your generosity and care for this boy will not be forgotten. He is extremely important. He is very close to me and is in every way, a brother to me. For the selflessness which you showed, your life will be a myriad blessing of many sorts. And I assure you...”

He paused for dramatics sake. “I assure you, whether or not the gods and goddesses whom you chant to daily, come to you, the Murugan god will be at your beck and call, before you even ask.”

Before they could say a word, Aaron tapped them both on the forehead with both of his index fingers. Their eyes bugged wide, and a rich warmth of electricity spread throughout their bodies. “I will be taking Caleb now. We have much work to do.”

With that, Aaron tugged on Caleb's sleeve, turned and walked in the direction from which he came. Caleb glanced at the couple, who was still in pleasant shock. He managed to say, "Ummm, thank you!" Then he turned and ran to catch up to Aaron.

He caught up with Aaron, clearly giddy. "What? How did you know I was...?"

"Honestly." He cut Caleb off. "Edward and I come and heal an entire village of diseases and problems, and you ask me how I knew when and where you would be?"

"Oh. Right." Caleb furrowed his brows and asked, "So now what? When do we leave to catch our flight to America?"

Aaron laughed heartily. "Silly boy. We're not. I need a half-day to rest, then we can leave for America. My way. The documents I showed them were purely for their benefit, so they wouldn't worry. They weren't real. It was merely an illusion for their eyes. But like I said, I need to rest, or at least not do much more than just sight-see. Then we leave."

"Oh." Caleb stared at Aaron as they walked. He was fascinated by the god before him. "So, do all gods dress so nicely?"

"Hahahahaha! That's about the funniest thing I've ever heard! At least in the past minute, anyway."

"Well. I don't know. How would I know?" Caleb wasn't sure how to act or what to say to Aaron. He looked upon Aaron as a god, and more of as a teacher or parent figure, rather than the equal he was destined to become.

"Don't worry." Aaron was very amused at his new friend. He knew it was his job and responsibility to teach Caleb every facet of the magicks of Muruga. He also needed to figure out a way to make Caleb feel like a brother instead of a student. *Not sure how that's gonna happen. Suppose I'll wing it, just like every other moment.* "You'll know everything you need to know soon

enough. Just stay present with me. Ask any questions you like. And above all else, let's just have fun."

"Okay then. So like, how old are you?" asked Caleb. "You look like you're in high school. But I'm not stupid. I saw how you handled all the grown-ups in the village. Unless, wait. Are you in high school?"

"I've honestly never attended a day of school in my life. The only schooling I've ever had was just living life and learning from it. As for my age, I really don't know. There's really no way to calculate it. I've always just... just been."

He stopped walking and closed his eyes for a few seconds. Then he opened them up and looked at Caleb. "I was never born, and I've always been. I've been alive for thousands of years. I don't remember when I was never not. To my knowledge, I won't be ending any time soon."

Caleb's eyes widened in amazement. "You're not lying, are you?"

"Nope. I wouldn't lie to you, little brother. Let me add, that even though you're only fifteen, don't let age control you. Your wisdom is not guided by your age. You will learn. You will absorb. The outer form of your body will not show what you know, but your eyes will. People will be able to see the wisdom from the intensity of your eyes, and they will hear what you have to say from the silence you display."

"Huh?" Caleb gave him a weird look. "Whatever you just said just went about three feet over my head."

"No," Aaron replied. "It went about three floors above your head. It's okay. Let's keep walking. As I said, you'll know everything you need to know, in time."

"So what's this place like in the Americas? What it's like over there?" Caleb was clearly very anxious.

Oh lord, Father. I shouldn't have told him to ask any question he'd like. "That answer will have to wait. The only way you'll know what it's like, is if you see it and experience it for yourself. Anything I tell you will just be a dry idea to what it actually is. Meaning, it won't mean squat to you. Understand?"

Caleb thought for a moment. "Yeah. Cause then it'd just be your idea of what it's like, not mine."

"Right."

"If I'm gonna be some great god like you, then I have to learn a bunch of stuff, right? What'll I be doing?" A fearful expression dawned on his face, although he tried to look courageous.

"I've put some thought into this," said Aaron. "I really think it would be useful if you actually did attend school. You know, fit in with other kids your age. That's part of it, at least."

"Really, why? Not that I care or anything. At this point, I'm just glad I'm out of that village. I'll pretty much do whatever. Just feed me. That's all I ask."

Aaron laughed heartily, then halted in place. He wanted to drive a very important point into Caleb. "As somebody who is granted the blessings and powers of my father and the Otherworlds, it's extremely important that you learn how to relate to people. People of every color, background and age, and people with problems ranging from relationships to finance to bum bodies that are diseased and failing.

"If you can relate to them, you'll know the best ways to connect with them and solve their problems. Me 'n Edward? We know how to relate to the people, so we were able to help your village. So I want you to be able to relate with people your age first. Find out what their problems are and why they're so depressed. Soon enough, you'll be dealing with adults. No rush in any of this. All the while, the Otherworlds will continue to open up to you."

Just then, Caleb realized he was speaking perfectly fluent English with Aaron, although he had never studied it. He stopped in his tracks. "Omagosh!"

"What's the matter?" Aaron turned around and looked at him perplexed.

"I've been talking in another language this entire time I met you! But... but I never learned how to!"

Aaron nodded in understanding. "Second son of Muruga, you did learn it. You absorbed a gift which I gave to you the day we met. I gave it to you without telling you. You now have the power to learn, or rather, know any language you wish you to. Edward has this gift also. By any language, I mean all languages. The language of those animals who talk back and forth to each other. The language of alien races not of this planet. It is all available to you."

Caleb was a bit shaken up. It was just beginning to dawn on him, who and what he was, although he still had no idea. "Why me? I mean, I'm not saying I'm scared or being a baby about this. It's pretty cool so far. But why did..." He tilted his head, not sure if he felt comfortable saying it or not. Then he continued. "Why did... why did Father choose me? I only wanted to leave home. That's it, really."

Oh boy. I knew this question was gonna be asked sooner or later. Aaron's lips twisted, and he sighed. "First, get used to thinking in that way and addressing him as Father. That's what he is to us after all. We are both the sons of Muruga.

"And second, I may be known as a god, but I honestly don't have all the answers. Father is a vastness that I sometimes can't comprehend, although I can. If that makes any sense at all? But this vastness of Muruga does as it does. And when it does, things are made to happen.

“I can only tell you, I’m along for this joyride as much as you are. For the moment, I’ve got a shit-ton more experience, and I know more than you. So I’m here to show you the ropes, until you’re ready to grab onto them and swing around by yourself.

“I’ll tell you this much,” Aaron added. “Those who are so-called ‘chosen’ are not necessarily just chosen. There had to be some kind of inner longing from you to want to experience something deeper than what you’ve been experiencing. All you’ve known is your village. Maybe that was enough for you to want more. It was bland, like a cage around you. Like your buttons were pushed to the very limits, and if you didn’t experience something better, you would’ve exploded.

“When you’re pushed to the limit, you become open to that vastness I was talking about. You’re not just some silly kid that Father chose. You opened up to something amazing and great. It was then presented to you, and you jumped at the chance to receive it.”

“Ummm, okay. I’m sorry I asked. Can we just have some fun now?” Caleb couldn’t take anymore.

“Yeah yeah yeah. My favorite motto. Let’s have some fun. No wait, I take that back. My favorite motto is, let’s blow something up.”

Caleb looked at him curiously, and Aaron just snickered. “Come on. Let’s just do something.”

CHAPTER 2

Part I: To America

Nine hours passed. Caleb had walked all over the city with his new “brother” just sight-seeing, petting random animals on the street and eating fruit from different stands in the outdoor markets. He even stood watch while Aaron napped for an hour on a bench to help regain the strength he needed to make the jump from East to West.

“I love India! I wish I had more time to explore and walk around, but we have things to do and people to see. And also, I’m pretty tired and need to rest.” Aaron told him, “I need for you to stand guard over me. This is your first assignment. Don’t let anyone near my backpack, and keep your mind focused on that mantra we gave you, Saravanabava. The more you use that power, the more you’ll become it. Okay, I’m gonna snooze now. Protect me. In exactly one hour, wake me up. We’ll leave for the West then.”

Immediately, Caleb felt useful and important. Aaron didn’t really need any protection. He only wanted Caleb to get used to doing things. As Aaron slept, Caleb was vigilant in his incantation of the mantra. And although his eyes were pointed outward to all who passed by, his focus remained in two worlds. The Otherworlds and the Earth Plane. Exactly what Aaron wanted him to accomplish and get used to.

After one hour, Caleb shook Aaron awake, and his eyes popped open. When they did, Caleb couldn’t see Aaron’s pupils at all, only white and gold sparkles of light. Aaron rubbed his eyes and yawned, closed them tightly and opened them back up. His pupils were showing again.

“It’s been an hour,” said Caleb.

“I’m still alive. Nobody touched me or took my backpack. Kudos to you, brother.”

Caleb was beaming. “So we leave now?”

“Yup. We leave.” It was nighttime already. Aaron stood up and looked around for an inconspicuous spot. “Let’s just walk a little and see if we can find an alley or some spot where nobody’s at. When I zip in and out of places, it causes a pretty big stir.”

After walking for seven blocks, they hopped a fence and ended up in the back of a run-down building. “This is perfect.” Aaron glanced at Caleb. “You scared?”

“Well, no. I mean, not really. Maybe a little?”

“It’s fine if you are. Even if you don’t admit it to other people, at least be honest with yourself. I’ve been scared before, although I think I’ve only admitted that to one person in the thousands of years I’ve lived. And that was to Edward. But when I was scared, I always admitted it to me, and then I found the strength to go on.”

“Yeah well, it helps when you can’t die.” Caleb let out an audible sigh. “Alright. I’m a little scared, but I’m also excited. I wanna feel this power go through me when we transport, and I’m excited to see a new part of the world.”

Aaron nodded in understanding. “This is special also. It takes an enormous amount of energy to do what we’re about to do. When I invoke this energy, you’ll be completely saturated by the energy and blessings of Father. Every cell of your body will be transformed. It’s like a shortcut. You get the wisdom and power stuffed into you, and you don’t even have to do a thing. No learning. No memorizing. No nothing. I do everything, and you just accept the energy into you.”

“That’s it? I don’t do anything?” Caleb was a bit skeptical.

“Nope. Just stay open to receiving. Now put your right hand on my hand. And whatever you do, don’t let go.” Aaron held tightly onto his Vel staff, while Caleb clutched onto Aaron’s hand.

“Again,” said Aaron. “Just stay open to receiving. Feel the power. Let it take you over. Surrender to it. The more you do, the more you become it. That’s the gist of it all, how humans become gods. They let the power of the gods become them. It’s actually very easy if you ask me. Oh, and don’t be too surprised. Where we’re going, it’ll be mid-day, and the sun’ll be out. Anywho, you ready?”

“Yeah, I’m ready.”

Aaron spoke a few incantations aloud for Caleb to hear. He pictured the location he wanted to go to, then slammed the bottom of the staff into the ground. The wind around them stirred in a frenzy, almost like a mini tornado. There was a low, vibrating hum, and light and energy shot into both of their bodies.

Caleb was shaking hard, but he did not release his grip. He felt the power of their father, Muruga, coursing through every vein, every cell. It lit up his brain, and he felt as if his body was on fire, without hurting or being burned.

All his thoughts ceased. In that moment of zero thoughts, he saw light exploding in everything around him. He realized, the light in the building and in the ground was the same light inside of him.

He understood. To become the god, a human mind does nothing. *So this is what it’s like. I am the power, and the power is me. I’ve always been this power. But... but I’ve always been too dumb to know it, and too deaf and too blind to hear it or see it. It’s so simple. I understand. The mortal does nothing, and that which is the god takes over and does everything.*

One more massive amount of energy and light entered into them both and shot out from their bodies in every direction. They were gone. All was quiet and desolate again in the back of the building.

Part II: The New Recruit

Edward stood outside on the back patio of his new home that Starko had readily welcomed him into. The Guardian Watchers, Heather, Gwen and Mery, were inside training with all the others. It was a relaxed time, if only for a moment, and he was able to gather his thoughts. He stared out into the backyard and drifted off into thought.

The brilliance of the first light, a pure white, will circle over the horizon during the battle cries of Earth's mourn. Winter will come to pass. The second, a wondrous blue light, will usher in the dawning of a new age as the three who walk amongst the flesh, will gather as one. Heed the cries of souls be gone. Earth, wind, fire, water and space, will bow before one, and all that is lost will be found.

“That damn prophecy.” He rubbed his face and took a deep breath.

Christopher and Gene walked out and joined him. Christopher pointed to all the stuff in the backyard. “It’s so perfect! Starko’s a genius. This place of his is a total cover-up. I mean, who’d wanna hang out in an abandoned lot filled with rusted junk? Besides us, of course.”

Gene pondered that for a moment. “Well, Starko did say that some drifters did try and take shelter here once, thinking it was exactly as you said. But every entrance was triple-secured, and they couldn’t get in.”

“Yup. I believe that.” Edward whistled. “Even Moloch’s henchmen would have trouble getting in this place. Break one lock or door, and you run into solid walls made of metal. On top of that, the power of the Sun is pouring

out from everything here, and it's literally telling people to overlook this place, like it's non-existent."

"It's my baby, this place." They turned around and were met with a wide grin from Starko. "This place looks like a rambled-up hell-hole on the outside. It's so deceiving."

"Got that right." Edward watched the cloud from his breath in the cold air as he talked. "You ever run into problems with the law with this place?"

"Sure did. A few years ago, the city sent the police here. They tried to declare this property a hazard. I claimed it was a storage place for me, and that the junk was needed for scraps for my art. They didn't buy into that too much and pressed me pretty hard. I think they just wanted it for their own use."

Starko cracked up in the middle of his story. "So I set up a meeting with city officials, and I brought Thomas in to pose as my lawyer. Thomas is a talker, definitely. With both of us in the room at the same time, we did a bit of mind influencing on them. They pretty much agreed to everything we said. Signed whatever we wanted, and we were out the door in thirty minutes!

"But Thomas, man, he was pretty ruthless. At one point, he told them all, 'That building is such a beautiful place. I really think you think that.' He was radiating this very strong power. Everyone in the room started to nod their heads in agreement. They were looking at pictures of this ugly building and telling each other how beautiful it was. They told us, as long as our property taxes were paid, we were as good as gold.

"Thomas could have gotten them to petition this place as a National Historic Landmark if he wanted to. Of course, that wouldn't do much good for us, since we're laying low."

"That's hilarious!" Christopher slapped his thigh. "This is one of the ugliest places I've ever seen, on the outside anyway. Hahahaha!"

Edward had drifted off into his own world, and the expression upon his face was somewhat grim. Christopher stared at him for a moment, then asked, "What's the matter, Edward?"

"Huh?" Edward snapped out of it. "Oh. I was just thinking, you know, about that stupid prophecy. I was reminded of that episode when you and Gwen were in New York, and she recorded you spitting out another damn prophecy that sounded related. Do you remember what you said?"

"Yeah, I watched it a few times afterward and memorized it. It was short enough. Just don't try and get me to memorize any speeches. Anyway, it went like this."

He thought for a moment, then mumbled through it. "When the three become one, the power inside and beyond all images and thoughts will destroy the blatant ignorance of humanity's self-inflicted pain."

"Can you say that with a little better diction and meaning?" Gene asked him, jokingly.

"Whatever, Gene! I'm a good actor. Besides, me and Edward made it on TV. You didn't."

Edward couldn't help but laugh. "I'm glad you guys are with me. You make me laugh during times like this. Before you all came out here, I was just thinking of the original prophecy, the one handed to us over 3000 years ago. When we merged into one entity not too long ago, and this other prophecy was given to Christopher, I was just thinking how it fits right in with the original."

"Yes, it does." Starko thought for a moment. "It all makes sense. You three were given the prophecy thousands of years ago. All three of you come back in this day and age. Then, when the three of you merged into one, while Edward was battling those flying beasts, a similar prophecy comes through Christopher. All signs point to keeping you three alive til the Blue Full Moon. Then we're golden."

“Yup.” Christopher sighed aloud. “I can’t wait for my body to not be so damn mortal.”

Just then, a huge wave of white and golden light shot across the roof and on both sides of the building, and the ground shook a little. All four of them ducked and placed their hands over their faces and eyes, completely startled.

Thomas came running out back. “What the hell was that?!”

They looked around for a minute in silence, until Edward spoke up. “Wait a minute! I know what it was. Somebody just couldn’t stay away! Come on, follow me!”

He ran around the side of the building, and the others followed suit. There, lying in the middle of the lawn, sprawled out on his back, was Aaron. He was staring up at the sky, lazily, and a small boy was sitting next to him.

He tilted his head forward and saw them all standing in front of him. “Heya, guys. Got any food? He likes cheese, by the way.” He pointed to Caleb.

“Aaron!” Edward ran up to him and gave him a hand. He looked at Caleb and smiled. “We’ve been expecting you. I’m sure your outlook on life is completely caput by now, hmmm?”

“Yes sir. I’d say so.” Caleb was a little dizzy from traveling. He tried to stand and wobbled a bit. Edward caught him and steadied him.

“And please don’t call me sir anymore. That’s just weird. Edward will do.”

Edward turned to the others. “Everyone, this is Caleb. He’s somewhat in training, but Aaron’s father has already claimed him as the second son of Muruga.” Edward then introduced Caleb to Christopher, Gene, Starko and Thomas.

Caleb looked at Aaron, then Edward. He shook his head and sighed. He was dazed and a bit in awe, since these were the two gods who had come to his village. He looked at the others and waved. “Yeah. I do like cheese.”

“Come on in then.” Edward led the way. “Let’s get you both some food. How long are you here this time, Aaron?”

“Not long, unfortunately. I need to rest, then zip back to the other side of the world and meet Gaia, so I can get those stones.” The look on his face saddened a little.

“I understand. Come on in.” Edward put his hand on Aaron’s shoulder. “You’ll be okay. You’ll be back in no time. Probably right in time to blow something up and get in Moloch’s way.”

“Yeah. That’d totally be fun.” The look on Aaron’s face cheered up. “Oh, and I need some new clothes. I’ve been in these too long. Got anything?”

“We’re about the same size. No problem there. Hopefully it’s fashionable enough for you, though.” Edward was glad that Aaron had lost his short wave of sadness.

“Yes, well, it better be. I only go out looking like a movie star. You know that, Edward.”

“Yes,” Edward agreed. “This is true.”

Inside, there was an exciting buzz. Another new recruit for the side of the gods. Patrick was enthused. There was somebody who was younger than him, but still cool enough to hang out with. Standing next to Caleb, Patrick sized him up and figured he was about three inches taller than Caleb, who was 5’5”. They sat down on a couple of bar stools at the kitchen counter, and Patrick jokingly said, “About time we got some diversity in here.” He put his arm against Caleb’s dark skin and laughed. Caleb just grinned.

Heather, who was standing nearby, rolled her eyes. “Yeah, because a few girls who can kick your ass, a young child who looks like he’s twenty-five, a sun god and three gods from thousands of years ago, AND a few evil henchmen who aren’t evil anymore isn’t diverse at all.”

Patrick stuffed his mouth with some of the mashed potatoes that Heather had made. “Yeah. You right. Caleb’s young, but Thomas’s protégé is technically the youngest I guess, since he’s only like seven? Damn though, looks like he’s twenty-five.”

“Just another day here at Starko’s.” Heather shrugged her shoulders and turned her back to them, so she could tune them out and focus on the rest of her cooking.

Caleb felt at home and was chomping on a grilled cheese sandwich, with all sorts of vegetables that were sautéed in the middle of it. They had been talking for some time, and Patrick changed the story and was telling him how he had ended up at Starko’s fortress.

“So yeah, dude!” Patrick was very animated. “I was in this gang, and we were like, all acting tough. It was five of us against Christopher and Gwen. Gwen was just sitting down, watching us all get our butts kicked by Christopher. Then, Christopher just froze us all in place with his powers! He told us all to leave, and we did. I ain’t never seen the rest of those guys since. We disbanded, and I somehow found my way here. I had to. It was like something kept calling me. Calling me and pulling me to Christopher. Now, Christopher is well, my ummm, Master.”

“That’s pretty cool,” said Caleb. “Aaron and Edward came to my village and turned it upside-down. But you know, in a good way. I begged Aaron to make things happen for me, so I could leave the village. I never expected he’d come and take me himself and bring me to a place like this. But here I am.”

Patrick nodded. “Yeah man, that’s pretty cool too. Oh! And I was wondering. Besides your accent, you speak damn near perfect English. And you’re fifteen? I just recently turned eighteen.”

“Yeah, fifteen. And yes, I somehow speak fluent English, even though I never studied it. Aaron did something, and then, blah blah blah.”

“They’re pretty cool, huh? Our teachers? My life before this pretty much sucked.” Patrick shook his head at the complete change he had undergone. “I was eating leftover scraps from people and sleeping in random places. I was a squatter.”

“My life didn’t really suck. It was just horribly boring.” Caleb took another bite. “This food is just amazing, compared to what I was eating. But anyway, every day, it was running around that stupid village, getting wood, or picking vegetables or scooping water. Actually, yeah. It did kinda suck too. But now I’ve discovered English and cheese, and life is good.”

Patrick cracked up. He was in a really good mood. He had been trying hard to relate to the girls and the gods, but was having so much trouble. It always seemed that he was at a loss for conversation with them. So he just listened, nodded his head and smiled when they looked at him.

“Yeah,” said Patrick. “The food here is hella good. It’s better than the day-old shit I was eating from restaurants when they tossed it out back.”

Caleb made a face and squinted. “Ew.”

“Oh yeah. Christopher told me I had to go to school. He told me it was necessary and not to argue.”

Caleb’s eyes lit up. “Really? Aaron told me the same thing. Maybe they’ll send us to the same school?”

“That’d be kinda cool. You’d be in a different grade. But you know, we could like watch out for each other.” Patrick was hopeful. He was small, and he hadn’t yet picked up the gift of gelling with other kids. It didn’t matter that Caleb was younger. All that mattered was that he wasn’t alone in some new place.

“Gwen on the other hand, she doesn’t have to go back to school.” Patrick frowned at that. “They said that she’s already seen enough and done enough, and that her training is on a completely different level now.”

“So like, that girl Gwen can totally kick our asses?” asked Caleb.

“Pretty much. She could easily tear us both apart. And Heather. Don’t EVER mess with her. She makes some awesome mashed potatoes, but I’m just sayin’.”

“What was that about messin’ with my mashed potatoes?” Heather looked up.

“Nothing.” Patrick stuffed another fork full in his mouth.

“Uh huh.” She nodded her head and squinted her eyes at him. “Looks like you like it enough.”

“Yup. Stuff’s good,” Patrick readily agreed. “You know me, Heather. I’d never knock on you or your cooking. Besides, I’d get my ass kicked if I did.”

Heather balled up in laughter. She walked to the refrigerator and pulled out some juice. She stood there gulping it in front of the two boys, then looked at Caleb. “So how are you liking it here?”

“It’s a huge change. I like it though. Everyone’s nice. And there’s like, a LOT of food that I’ve never heard of or smelled or eaten before. So I’m gonna eat it all now, while I have the chance.”

“You act like you’re goin’ somewhere and this ain’t gonna last.” Heather raised her eyebrows and stared at him.

“Well, no.” Caleb was defensive. “I just haven’t had a lot of stuff in life. Now that I have this, I’m gonna eat it ALL. You never know when it might run out.”

Heather was done teasing him. “Relax, kid. I’m only pulling your ropes. You can eat whatever you want, when you want. I don’t care. Just have fun and enjoy it. This stuff ain’t running out any time soon.” She glanced at the

food she was making and added, "I'll finish all that later." She then walked out of the kitchen and left them both sitting there quietly.

Caleb was the first to speak up. "Yeah. I think she could totally take us both out in a fight. What do you think?"

"Oh yeah. Definitely."

Part III: A Defiling of Faith

A gathering of ugly beasts, deformed bodies and a stench that wafted through the entire hall. He sat upon the throne, giving eye to everyone in the room, one at a time. He was sure not to miss anyone in there, and he made sure that everyone who was supposed to be there, was there.

Raiju, tall, muscular and over a thousand years old. There were veins popping out of his forehead, and his arms and legs looked like massive clubs. His dark hair flowed down passed his shoulders, and he was at least a foot and a half taller than his master. He was second in command and stood at the right side of his fearless leader, awaiting instructions.

After what seemed an eternity of silence, his master spoke. "Raiju. You have brought them, I see." His voice was sinister, menacing.

"I have, my lord."

"Yes, yes. Take the blindfolds off."

Raiju walked to where the four couples were kneeling at the front of the room, not too far from where his leader was seated. He untied the blindfolds on each of them. The look in their eyes when they looked around the room was pure horror, and they were all shaking.

"And the gags, Raiju. Allow them to be vocal."

"Yes, my lord." Raiju removed the gags from their mouths. None of them said a word. They were too scared.

Moloch casually stood up and walked toward the couples. He stood in front of them. "Eight of you. Four couples. Four different religions. This first couple is of the Christian descent. Here, we have a lovely couple from the Hindu tradition." He paused. "Ahhh... and Buddhist followers. Lastly, the renegades of the bunch, a Pagan couple."

Moloch nodded in satisfaction. “My instructions were to find four couples who showed unwavering, strong faith in their chosen god or leader. Not to mention, the strong ties of your love for each other as couples, which bind and bond you together in strength and hope. Am I right?”

He gazed intensely at each of them, but none of them said a word. He then addressed the Buddhist couple. “Am I right?”

“Yes, the husband said. Our love for each other, and our belief in a great wisdom is something that I feel you do not understand. I know not who you are, but I do know that what we have, is something you will never take away from us.”

Moloch cackled loudly. It filled the entire hall. “You are so wrong. Before your precious leader stepped foot on the Earth millenniums ago, the roots of my brethren had already planted their foothold in this plane.”

He stared at the Christian couple. “And your fearless leader. It took him and another god to finally banish my brother, just over two thousand years ago. Yet, the tides of my power are still firmly rooted here. It continues to grow in my name.”

The woman from the Pagan couple spoke up. “You’re a complete idiot. Seeing as how we’re all about to die, I might as well say what I’m thinking. You’re just another moronic cult leader, dressed all suave to perfection. You look like you’ve been grooming yourself to be on television, like you’re someone important who needs to be listened to. But inside, you’re a lunatic, deluded to whatever point you’re at. Whatever this is that’s going on, it definitely defies the reality of nature. And what the hell are you talking about, your brother of two thousand years?”

She looked around, disgusted at the company she was with. “And who ARE these people, these things?!”

Moloch stuck his index finger out and waved it back and forth while making a clicking sound with his tongue. "You did well, Raiju. They really are very faithful to their beliefs, their stupid religions."

He paced back and forth for nearly a minute, then stopped. His back was to the entire hall, and his hands were at his hips. He shook his head back and forth in agitation.

Then he screamed, "And it is THIS faith, this hope in humanity, which we must crush! Here and now, you will see the strongest traditions crushed before your eyes! My children! I will give you all hope today by allowing you to bear witness to this slaying! Once done, we will continue to slay the faithful, those who relish in their beliefs!"

A second later, there was a loud boom in the hall, and dark hues of light shot from Moloch's body. All the couples squeezed their eyes shut and had to turn away. When they turned back around, there was a large bull standing on two legs in front of them. Half man, half bull, and pure muscle. In this form, Moloch actually stood taller than Raiju. He turned and faced the couples. Immediately, everyone else in the room got down on one knee. Color drained from the faces of the four couples. They all grabbed hands. A string of eight people in a row, praying to their chosen god, and giving each other support in their last moments.

Low, rumbling and terrifying was his rasp. Moloch screamed again. "My brother was the most famous Demon King in all of history! But he was stupid! He was caught! He failed!" He pointed at the Christian couple. "Your master and the winged god took my brother's life! My brother was cast into the darkest chasms below any known underworld by the Great Wizard and Mikhael! It was HE who was written about and defiled in the scriptures. HE was the idiot! He was the one who died! Not me! Today, you will die! And this, my children! THIS is my gift to you today!"

He raised his arms high into the air, and the entire hall exploded in a raucous cheer. All four couples still held tightly to the hands next to them. It had dawned on them what Moloch was and who his brother was. They were all incessantly praying, surrendering. They had surrendered to the deaths of their bodies. But he would not take their souls, nor their dignity.

They looked to and fro each other, tears in their eyes. They all said “I love you” to each other. They all remained firm and present to their chosen god.

Suddenly, Moloch turned to them, enraged. “Stop praying! Raiju, make them stop!” Moloch stomped around furiously, muttering to himself. “It hurts! It hurts! They have to stop! Their connection to each other! Why does it hurt so much?!”

Raiju gagged their mouths again and separated their hands. Moloch trampled over to the couples again and looked at them closely. “They still bond with each other! They still believe! I can feel it! This pain! It has NOTHING to do with their hands. They can hold hands or not. They are still bonded!”

The entire hall was dead silent. Moloch screeched a low but loud bellow, and his arms were raised in the air again. He took off running twenty feet away, then turned around and ran at full force toward the couples. With his right hand extended, he beheaded them all one at a time in a blurry motion.

Unbeknownst to Moloch, in a distant barrier, almost in another dimension, Damenion sat in a chair, watching the entire scene. “You fool. You stupid, stupid fool. You’ve gone about this in all the wrong way. You are such a stupid fool. You have no wit, no mind, no plan. You are truly the dumbest demon to have ever lived, and your brother was by far, more cunning than you could ever be.”

Moloch grabbed two of the heads and stood up. He bellowed again, and the hall responded in an eruption of cheers.

The next moment, a bright light filled the hall and condensed into a lighted figure standing behind the collapsed bodies. The figure of light spoke out to Moloch, and there was an eerie echo to it.

“Moloch. You brought these couples here to give hope to your followers, while they watched you perform a malicious slaying. Yet, you did not count on the boundless faith of those whom you defiled. None of them wavered. In their last moments, they depicted the very epitome of true love, and they all gave each other strength up to their last breaths. It was not just the strength of the gods. It was the strength they gave to each other. And in their very last moment, each of them surrendered. Their surrender gave way to enlightenment. In short, they all became the gods.”

Moloch cowered away in fear. He whispered, “Mikhae.”

Mikhae simply nodded. In a very calm voice, he stated, “You cannot have them. They belong to me now. I could have easily saved them, but that was not the destiny which was laid out for them. They are far better off now in the hands of the Otherworlds, than what was given to them on this plane of existence. What will you get? The most you will get are their bodies, which counts for nothing. As for the battles which lay ahead, it is not of my dealings. The gods who walk the Earth now are the rivals which you must face in the days and weeks to come. You should fear them.”

Mikhae turned and faced the entire hall. “Play your game. Play it well. It is part of the design of seemingly random events, which happen each and every moment. Suffering is sure to happen. Is it the suffering which you endorse and spread throughout the lands? Or is it the inherent suffering within each of you that screams to be released? That too is part of the design. One day, you may grow tired of playing the game. Who can say for sure? In the end, you too, will belong to me.”

His glowing eyes scanned the room. For a split-second, Mikhae rested his eyes on the distant barrier of which Damenion inhabited. Then, in a flash, Mikhae was gone. The hall was silent.

Part IV: The Crossing of Two Lineages

Aaron was sound asleep on a couch in a big, open room next to a fire place, with his feet propped up on a pillow. Edward was seated on the floor, just a foot and a half away from him. He gazed at the staff cradled in Aaron's arms. It was mesmerizing, and it radiated a pure aura which matched the god who was holding it.

He counted the breaths Aaron took while asleep. No more than two each minute. For a time, Edward was transfixed, staring at the rise and fall in Aaron's chest as he breathed in and out, wondering how he only got away with two breaths per minute.

He turned his gaze toward the fire. He glanced once more at Aaron. *Perhaps the greatest god to walk this Earth. Who knows? By far, the most powerful. A god whose body never ages. Never dies. Never loses. He's... he's never lost a battle.*

Gene and Christopher were in the next room chatting up a storm with the girls. Patrick and Caleb still occupied the kitchen.

Edward closed his eyes for nearly half an hour. He had fallen into a meditation and was swaying back and forth lightly. He had become a direct connection to the Otherworlds.

Halfway through his meditation, the soft murmuring of voices penetrated his mind. The voices turned into pleas, then cries. Louder and louder the voices became, until he was able to make out the words which went along with the voices.

In his trance, he stepped back and listened. It was as if he was on a mountain, with wires attached to him that led back to the voices. Plain as day,

he heard, "Don't let him take us. He can have my body. He can have our bodies. Please. Please save us!"

Edward looked around. He was trying to locate the voices. He turned left and saw nothing. He turned right and realized Aaron was standing next to him in his dream meditation.

Aaron pointed. "There. Do you see them?"

"I do." Edward saw four couples kneeling before a grossly, oversized Minotaur. "Their prayers are penetrating so deeply. We both heard them calling out."

Suddenly, both Aaron and Edward opened their eyes, roused from their sleep and the dream they were both pulled into. They heard the crackle of the fire. They looked at each other, and both just let their heads fall in silence.

Aaron was the first to speak. "Moloch will take their bodies. But..."

"Yes. I know," said Edward. "But he can't have their essences."

"Right." Aaron slumped his shoulders and leaned back into the couch. "We both know that if the mortal makes direct contact with the gods, and the gods can clearly hear them, then in the end, they'll be fine. If not us, then another god must already be there to save them. Those four couples were so intent. They actually made direct contact with both of us."

Edward was lost in thought. "I wonder who came to them. Somebody rescued their essences. It's Law, after all."

"I don't know. But one thing's for sure. I can't delay much longer. I've tried to put off my mission as much as possible so that I could spend more time here with you. And also to hang out with everyone else. But by the way it looks, Moloch is starting to get antsy." Aaron stood up. "It's time to upgrade Caleb. He needs that, before I go."

Edward added, "Patrick also. Christopher needs to pump him up a few levels also."

Edward and Aaron called Christopher and Gene into the room. The girls followed them in. After revealing everything they had seen, everyone was in agreement. The two boys needed upgrading. They also agreed to stick with the plan and put them into schooling.

“It’s a fast track to learning how to relate,” Aaron explained. “Once they have the hang of it, then we can pull them out. While at home, you all can train them both at night. Caleb can still upgrade his powers by being around all of you. He already has a direct connection to me, so I’m not worried. I will be there in his dreams to train him.”

It was decided. Edward sent Heather to get the two boys.

Heather walked into the kitchen. The look on her face was all business. “Up. Things are going down, and you’re both needed. Now.”

They looked at each other, got up and followed Heather into the room where the others were. Edward explained what had just happened. He told them they were going to be more powerful, and that afterward, they would have more wisdom.

Aaron agreed. “Both of you have already received transmissions from the gods.” He pointed at Patrick. “Your energy levels have been rising every day since you met Christopher. Your first meeting with him, it was a sort of informal initiation into the magicks of Gaia. And Caleb, the day you met me, our father and I gave you an initiation into the magicks of Muruga. Again, informal, but still very potent and worthwhile. Already, you both wield the powers of the gods. We just haven’t told you what to do or how to use those powers.”

They both looked at him in disbelief, unsure of what he just said.

“Fine. Let’s do a demonstration and prove myself right on this so we can move on.” Aaron looked at Christopher and gave a small nod toward Patrick.

“Right.” Christopher walked up to Patrick and very gently tapped him on the forehead. There was an immediate spark inside of Patrick, swirling, vibrating in every cell and inside of his brain. He saw an image of a woman, a goddess, in his mind. She lost form and turned into light.

“Go ahead Patrick,” instructed Aaron. “I want you to visualize a clump of dirt and put out that fire in the fireplace. You are basically going to steal some dirt from outside and move it in here. See it. Feel it. Ask for it. Make it happen. Don’t strain. Just know that it will happen.”

Patrick did as he was told. His brows creased. Aaron put his hand on his shoulder and said, “Relax. It will happen.”

With those words, a clump of dirt appeared in front of Patrick at his feet. They all tried to hide their amusement, since he missed his mark. Except for Heather, who blurted out in a hysterical whinny of a laugh.

“Can I toss the dirt at her?” Patrick asked, clearly annoyed.

“It’s okay, Patrick. You’re doing great.” Christopher shot Heather a disapproving look, which Patrick saw. When Patrick turned his head, Christopher then snickered in Heather’s direction, which caused her to laugh again. “Move it to the fireplace.”

Patrick concentrated once more. The dirt moved. It floated in the air and cycled around in a swirl. In one sweeping motion, it shot into the fireplace, dousing out the fire.

Patrick yelled out. “Yeah! Did you see that?!”

They all congratulated him, which gave him inspiration and encouragement. Aaron turned to Caleb. “Your turn. I want you to burn a hole in that dirt. Pierce through to the wood and set it back on fire.”

Caleb was a bit apprehensive at first. *If Patrick did it, so can I.* He closed his eyes and breathed. Aaron took his Vel staff and tapped him on top of the head. A piercing force of energy shot through Caleb’s entire body.

Determined, Caleb opened his eyes and put his hands out in front of his body. A bolt of energy, which looked like lightning, blasted from his hands and went straight into the dirt and wood. At first, smoke. Then the fireplace exploded into a luminous fire.

“Brilliant!” Aaron was obviously elated. “Without any training, you both very easily stepped up to the challenge. Neither of you knew that you could do this stuff, but you did it! After we upgrade your powers, we’ll start your training immediately. I can only be here for just a very short time to help. When I leave, the others will take over.”

In a dramatic sort of way, Aaron tilted his head slightly and swayed a little in his body. With a very southern drawl, he stated, “Ya’ll know that I gots things ta do. Very important things, matter of factly. Father told me I best be gettin’ to throwin’ some rocks around. Father’d take a switch ta my hide if I ain’t do dem things. Times a runnin’ short, so we best git on wit it.”

This cracked the group up to no end, something Aaron was very good at doing. “Alrighty, it’s time.” Aaron instructed Patrick and Caleb to kneel with their backs to the fireplace. He stood in front of Caleb, while Christopher stood in front of Patrick.

By this time, Starko and Thomas had entered the room and were watching. Thomas stretched his mind back to the days when Starko had fueled his entire system with the energy of the sun. He was trying to remember what it felt like. The changes. The realizations. The power. The wisdom. The feeling of being lost in a trance, void of thoughts for the very first time.

Thomas nodded in appreciation. *It’s a good day for these boys.* And suddenly, he realized he had forgotten something. “Oh, right.”

“What’s up?” Starko asked him.

“I just realized, now would be a good time to name my protégé. After all, we can’t have everyone calling him ‘hey’ or ‘you’. And it’ll bring him more

power. Since they're doing their thing with Patrick and Caleb, this will fit right in. What do you think?"

"I think it's an amazing idea." Starko pondered for a moment. "Maybe you should do it right after they're finished?"

"My thoughts exactly," Thomas agreed.

Aaron leaned over and whispered something in Christopher's ear. Christopher giggled for a second, then wiped his grin away really quick.

"Okay, ready guys?" Aaron waited for them both to say yes. "Good. On the count of three and exactly three, Christopher and I are going to flood your bodies with energy. The energies of Muruga and Gaia. I don't wanna talk much on this, cause the theory about it all isn't as important as the experience."

He shrugged. "But well, I will still talk about it. Muruga is a very aggressive energy. It's a battling energy, and an energy that takes pity upon those in need. Gaia is a very calming energy. She still battles in her own way. Both are energies that save, heal and protect. Doing this side by side, I don't doubt that Caleb will receive some of the energies of Gaia, and that Patrick will receive some of the energies of Muruga.

"I honestly don't know for sure, but who knows what may happen? Anywho. On three." He paused and turned to Christopher, who gave his signal that he was ready.

Aaron placed his right hand atop Caleb's head and grasped the back of his skull and neck with his left hand. Christopher did the same with Patrick. Aaron started the count. "One."

At that moment, both he and Christopher jumped the gun and blasted the two boys with powerful streams of energy, catching them both off guard. Edward and Gene both coughed, trying to hold back the noise from their snickering.

Immediately, Patrick and Caleb jolted in surprise and ecstasy, and both were lost in a world of trance, filled with light, ringing bells and winds that seem to come from nowhere.

Patrick

Patrick's body was glowing with a radiant, golden hue. For a moment, his soft, green eyes and dark hair disappeared. The golden lights were shooting out of his eyes and hands, and the top of his head was shining. His inner world was met by a giant goddess, who shrunk her form down to the size of a regular adult.

She spoke. "My son. That IS who you are. Up to this point, no title has been bestowed upon you. Realize now, that you are Gaia's third. In your moments of awareness, you will find yourself inside of every tree, every pebble, the soil which you walk upon, and within all the gushing waters of this immaculate Earth."

She said no more. Her body exploded into millions of tiny golden orbs of light, which floated in all directions around him. The orbs cycloned in a clockwise direction, faster and faster, until they pierced into his heart center. Waves and waves of light entered into him. Patrick screamed. It hurt. It was blissful. It seemed an eternity.

Silence. The goddess was gone. He was thankful for the silence. No thoughts. No sound. Then it came.

A gushing, howling wind from... from where? He felt nothing, but he heard it, louder and louder. A loud, piercing thunder crackled. So loud that it reverberated through his entire body, causing him to shake violently.

Tears were streaming down his face, and he was blinded by white, gold and red rays of energy. They seemed to come from his own body. Still lost

in a world of trance, he tried to speak, but he could not. The lights moved, as if they had a mind of their own.

The next moment, the lights exploded in all directions, before forming into a blazing weapon that danced a few feet away and in front of him. It was the Vel staff of Muruga, sparkling red and emanating an unseen power that seemed to suck him into a void.

A voice boomed from the weapon. "Son of Gaia! Fortune has smiled upon you this day. Such is a rare occurrence. For only a small handful in all the galaxies are born into a world mesmerized by more than one lineage. From this moment on, Gaia's third has also been willed to be the third son of Muruga."

The Vel staff in front him twirled and floated in mid-air, with the tip of the spear pointed at his forehead. It hummed loudly. And like an arrow, it shot straight into the middle of his forehead and disappeared inside of him.

Patrick screamed again. His body turned a brilliant red. Christopher held him tightly, as Patrick's body had begun to convulse. Saliva dripped from his mouth. His eyes were completely open for all to see. No pupils. Just the changing colors of light, from white to gold to red to white.

His screams stopped. His body relaxed and sagged. He was unconscious, and Christopher placed him gently on the floor to rest.

Caleb

A gush of wind, howling and drilling into his ears. Where it was, or where it was coming from, he did not know. He was trembling, but he could feel nothing. Scary, powerful and entrancing. Bursts of light filled his entire dream world inside.

They flickered like a strobe. Brighter and brighter they became, a mixture of white, gold and red, deeper in color and more vivid than he had ever before seen.

The colors swirled around him, inside of him. And like Patrick, the darkness of his hair and eyes vanished. He was being completely taken over by those flaring lights of white, gold and red. His body disappeared and reappeared. The gleaming lights pulsed in his eyes and exited through his hands. A blast of thunder, and the Vel staff of Muruga appeared before him. It seemed to explode in colors of red in every direction.

A loud voice rang out. "Second son of Muruga! Millions and millions of years in the past, it was pre-ordained for this moment to occur. The battle energy of Muruga is driven deep within and beyond your blood and bones. Walk this planet now, in knowingness, in fortune, and in fearlessness!"

The staff spun like a drill in the air, before shooting like a rocket, straight into his forehead. Caleb let out a high-pitched cry. He shook uncontrollably, while Aaron held him with a mighty grip.

Every cell of his body was ignited, and it too shined a fiery red. It burned. It thrilled him. He laughed, and he cried. As fast as it had begun, it was suddenly over. A quiet solitude in darkness.

That solitude only lasted for a short time. It was replaced by an all-embracing golden hue of pure energy, which encompassed him completely. His body had turned into this light. Where his body used to be, a deep, rhythmic pulse was beating, like a heartbeat or a very deep drum. Each time it beat, the light grew more radiant.

He had no idea how much time had passed. He was caught in a daze, completely taken over by the light. Caleb heard an explosion. Everything stopped. Before him stood the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.

Her long, flowing hair sparkled, and her voice penetrated deeply into every part of him. "Second son of Muruga! Your battle energy is a saving grace for those who tread the veins of my world. You will surely grow in this power, and you will reverberate with the wisdom of the ancients from long ago.

“An extraordinary and uncommon occasion this very day will prove to be. The battle power of Muruga, which flows through your thoughts, your blood, will be balanced by the vitality of Earth, and all the liveliness which streams from my command. Second son of Muruga, from this point on, know that you have been willed to be Gaia’s fourth!”

The light from Gaia turned into a flowing river of gold. It gyrated and spiraled in front of him, before it came gushing toward him, forcing its way into the middle of his chest.

Caleb screeched, both in horror and delight. “It hurts! It... it hurts!” His insides felt as if they were melting, unwinding, and he felt himself inside of everything around him. His head was spinning in all directions.

His eyes popped open, and golden light flooded the room before him. Then he passed out, and Aaron placed him gently on the floor.

Awakened

Patrick and Caleb had tranced out at the exact time. After their initiations, they both passed out in the same moment. Both slept on the floor on their stomachs in front of the fireplace for exactly five hours and thirty-three minutes.

Upon awakening at the same time, they opened their eyes to see Aaron, Christopher, Edward, Gene, Starko and Thomas watching over them. Groggily, they sat up. When they did, they both found a sharp weapon on the floor where their bodies had been stretched out.

Everyone in the room gasped. Even Christopher and Aaron, who saw everything that happened to Caleb and Patrick in their inner worlds, were astonished by the new weapons. Although Aaron and Christopher had explained what happened to Patrick and Caleb, it was a surprise to see that Muruga had gifted them both with his signature Vel staff.

Both boys reached out and took hold of their new weapons. When they lifted the staffs in the air, two white lotus flowers sprung up from beneath the floor from out of nowhere. The goddess had also gifted them.

Part V: The Naming

Thomas leaned over to Starko and whispered, "Alright. Now that the boys are awake, let's spring this on them. I wanted Patrick and Caleb to witness what happens when somebody gets a new name."

Starko agreed. "Right." He spoke to the group while Thomas left the room to get his protégé. For Caleb's sake, since he had never heard the story, Starko told a condensed version of how the young boy, known as Thomas' protégé, was turned into the grotesque form of one of Moloch's mercenaries. He told of how Thomas took pity on him and gifted him with a new, pristine body, comparable to a youthful adult in his mid-twenties. He then explained what Thomas was about to do.

"Thomas has decided to give his protégé a new name. He wanted it to be a surprise. He also wanted Patrick and Caleb to see what takes place during a Naming," Starko told everyone.

"Fantastic!" Aaron clapped his hands together. "The more upgrades we can give everyone, the better!"

Thomas returned with his protégé, who still seemed to be a little shy and intimidated by all the gods before him. "Alrighty. Your turn by the fireplace. Over there." He pointed at the blazing fire.

Thomas then spoke to everyone. "I figured, since we're in the mode of powering up everyone as best we can, this would be the perfect time to gift him with a new name. After all, we can't keep calling him 'protégé' or 'hey you'. That gets old, and it's probably starting to rile him up. Starko, wanna help me with this?" Thomas asked. "I think it'd be special for him to have the teacher of his teacher here with him while this happens."

“Absolutely!” Starko walked over to where Thomas was. The boy, who was only seven years in age, but looked in his mid-twenties, confidently stood tall at 6’1”. His jet-black hair draped a bit over his chiseled cheeks. He took a deep breath and tightened his muscles, then relaxed and took a deep breath. His dark, black eyes pierced into the room, as he awaited instructions from Thomas. He was told to kneel with his back to the fireplace, which he did. Thomas stood in front, while Starko took his place at the boy’s right side. Everyone, including Caleb and Patrick, took a seat, eagerly awaiting what was about to happen.

Thomas looked down at his student. “You went from being an innocent little kid, to being tortured and deformed. But you were graced by the greatness of Surya, himself, and transformed into the perfect human being. Meaning, you have an innocence about you still, but because of the tortures you experienced, you grew up and matured, emotionally, very fast. Through the transformation from Surya, you became a warrior with an awesome display of powers, which you have not yet used or have been shown how to use.

“Along with these gifts, you were given what most people on the Earth crave. Physical beauty, with a body that any top athlete would admire. Everything that was given to you will be of help for you in the future. What we are about to give you now in a new name will further enhance your state of being, and it will further ingrain in you, the powers which you already have.”

Aaron leaned over and whispered to Edward. “This is pretty exciting. Maybe I should get a new name. You think my powers will increase if I do?”

Edward tried not to laugh aloud. “I don’t think anyone in any galaxy has enough power to empower you any more than you already are. You could go by Bob or Walla Walla, and you’d still be able to kick anyone to the dirt that you come across. Keep the name.”

“Then Aaron’s fine? You like it? Yeah, I think I’ll keep it.” He giggled. “I think it fits me better than Walla Walla. Unless of course you really think I should go by Walla Walla? I highly value your opinion.”

Edward covered his mouth so that he would not snort out loud.

Thomas placed his right hand atop the boy’s head, and Starko placed his left hand on the back of his skull. Thomas began the incantation. “We call upon the power of Surya. From Surya himself, through the first and second sons of Surya, we emblazon this child with the rawness of the Eternal Fires that always burn. The final threads of your former life will now be annihilated, and your new name will signify the change from the past to this moment of now and on. Your new name and calling will now be known as...”

He paused and looked at Starko, and a big smile spread across his face. “...as Sunny.”

Starko tilted his head a bit, then nodded. “I like it. Fitting.”

With that, they both released the power into Sunny. An intense heat radiated throughout, and the room raised a few degrees. The fire in the fireplace responded, exploding in sparks and shooting out flames.

Sunny screamed, both in pain and delight. Inside of his body, he was burning at two hundred degrees and rising. The three of them were encased in a raging fire, blazing in orange, yellow and white. His body was now at five hundred degrees and still rising. Everyone in the room had to get up from where they were seated and move to the back, because of the intensity of the heat. Patrick and Caleb looked on in awe.

Within his mind, Sunny was shirtless and barefoot. He looked down at himself, confused. He was met by an enormous figure with a booming laughter. “Hahahahahahahahaha! An astounding day! Don’t you think so, Sunny? By the way, I chose your name, myself!”

“Su- Surya?” Sunny asked him.

“Indeed!” He gave Sunny a serious look. “But you should get used to calling me Father.” There was a glow about the god, and he walked toward Sunny, until he stood directly in front of him and four feet higher than him. In a split-second, Surya’s body turned into one big fire, but still kept the form with head, arms and legs.

He placed his hand on Sunny’s chest, which caused his body to also turned into fire. Sunny screamed out again, within his mind, and audibly to everyone in the room. “STOOOOOOP!! STOP IIIIIITTT!! TAKE IT OFF!! IT BURNS!! TAKE YOUR HAND OOOOFFFFF!!”

“No can do, Sunny,” Surya answered in a happy tone. “Besides, it’ll only burn for a few minutes. And by that, I mean twelve minutes. When Starko went through this, he cried like a baby. But now look at him. And he is your idol.”

Twelve minutes went by, and the burning stopped. His body returned to normal. Within the confines of his mind, Sunny was hunched over. Drool was seeping from his mouth, and he was coughing and panting profusely. His knees were on the ground, and he was pounding the ground with his fists while coughing.

Surya watched over him for a few minutes and allowed him to catch his bearings. Then he told him to stand up straight. He did. “I need to go now. Realize, I am always with you.” Surya tapped him on the head, and fire started to pour out from Sunny’s eyes, ears, nose and mouth. This time, however, there was no pain, no burning. Sunny stood rooted in place with his eyes closed. When he opened them up, Surya was gone. He found himself in a long and swirling, dark tunnel. There was a howling wind and bells which seemed to chime from a distance.

He looked at his hands. A thought came to him. *Burn*. His hands turned into fire, and he stared at them in awe. *Stop*. The fires went out.

A voice echoed out to him. "Sunny! Come back!" Sunny looked everywhere but saw no one. *Father.*

That one thought sent him spiraling through the tunnel, spinning round and round, until he awoke with a jolt, staring wide-eyed at Thomas and Starko. He looked to the back of the room and saw the entire group watching him. He looked down at his hands and whispered, "Burn." Instantly, his hands turned into a blazing fire. He brought them closer to his face and watched it for a few seconds. "Stop." The fires in both hands instantly went out, and his hands were still smooth.

Sunny closed his eyes. His head was spinning, and his body was swaying. He toppled forward into Thomas and passed out.

"Atta boy, Sunny." There was a wide grin on Thomas' face. "Starko, now that that's done, there's something I've gotta check out. Something's been nagging me, and I really need to follow up on a lead at some factory with a bunch of missing kids. Can you watch him?"

"Of course I can. Do what you need to do."

Thomas turned to the group and told them he needed to take care of business with the "other side". He gave them all a wave and walked out.

Starko laughed to himself. *Thomas, you're always on top of it.*

CHAPTER 3

Part I: Battle Training 5 Days before Winter Solstice

Everything was arranged for Caleb and Patrick to attend school. Starko had all the forged documents ready, with addresses and pictures. According to the documents, they were half-brothers, with a different mother. Caleb's age was changed to sixteen, and he was entering as a sophomore. Patrick's age was changed to seventeen, and he was entering as a junior.

"It'll work." Starko cracked up. "It's that school up on Western. They wanted me to start the boys after the holiday break, but I insisted on having them come in now."

Edward was lying on the floor on his back. He tilted his head upward. "Good idea. The sooner they get in and get out, the better. Of course, we won't tell them that we plan on pulling them out until that time comes, right?"

"Right."

"Good." Edward stood up and took a look at the documents. "Good enough for me. You're a total genius."

Aaron was seated on the couch. He reached his hand out, and Edward handed him the documents. "Edward's right. You're a genius, Starko. That's done, and everything else is moving along really fast. Caleb and Patrick were awakened. Sunny was named. All in a day's work, huh?"

"Pretty amazing," Starko agreed.

Aaron gave the documents to Starko and stood up. "I feel like working with them right now. Afterward, I have to leave to meet the goddess herself. If I put this off any longer, Father really will take a switch to me." He pulled out the orb that Christopher had given him. "This lil pretty's gonna show me the way!"

As if sensing the orb, Christopher walked in. "Tell Mother I say hello." The orb responded to his presence and glowed softly.

"I'll be sure to do just that, my friend. Now, before them crazy kids get too comfortable, where are they?"

"They're in the kitchen," said Edward. "Eating. Again."

"I would be too if I went through what they went through." Aaron left the others and walked into the kitchen. "It's that time, boys. You have one evening with me. Then I leave for Mars. Put the food away. You'll need it later after we do some battle training. Trust me. You'll be hungry."

They entered the training hall where Starko's paintings of the symbols, Om and Satori, were hanging on opposite sides of the walls. Blazing fire torches lined both sides of the hall.

"Whoa!" Caleb was enthralled by the beauty and intensity of the room.

"Yeah!" Patrick's face lit up with excitement. "That was my reaction when I first saw all of this!"

Aaron promptly unsheathed his Vel staff and instructed them to do the same. "What you want the staff to do, it will do. I mean, don't get me wrong. It ain't gonna make you a cake or anything, but it will respond to your thoughts." The staff in Aaron's hands was merely a foot long. "Usually, all I do is think for it to lengthen, and it does." Before he finished his sentence, the staff had grown to over five feet long, with a powerful light gushing from it. "Your turn."

Caleb and Patrick looked at each other and nodded their heads. As soon as they released their thoughts, the staffs in both their hands grew to the exact same height as the one in Aaron's hands.

"Good." Aaron turned his back on them. His cheerfulness and easy-tempered manner had drizzled away. He was in battle mode. "The very nature and instinct of Muruga is already built into you both. You already know how to

fight, how to move. Stop your thoughts, and just act. Now. Rush me. And please, do not hold back.”

Something in them clicked. Their bodies straightened, and their eyes were glowing. Lightning quick, they rushed Aaron with spears at the ready. At the last moment, Aaron leaped, then somersaulted and twisted in the air, landing behind them.

Patrick and Caleb quickly shifted flanks to left and right, circling back to where Aaron was. They found themselves working in unison, without having to give orders back and forth to each other. Patrick released a bolt of energy from his staff, while Caleb continued to rush forward. A very short moment later, Caleb released a powerful charge from his left hand, while swinging his own staff at Aaron’s chest with his right arm.

Aaron deflected the zap from Patrick with his own weapon. At the last second, he ducked before the blast from Caleb connected. He spun around in a roundhouse kick close to the ground and took Caleb’s legs out. At the moment of contact with Caleb, Patrick was already on top of him, ready to pounce. His hands high in the air, he came down in a chopping motion, in a downward slice. Aaron deflected that too with his own staff. Then, he flipped backward to put some distance between him and the boys.

Holy moly. Fighting these two ain’t like fighting demons. They’re faster and deadlier.

By this time, the others had filtered in to watch what was happening. Gods, Guardian Watchers, the former mercenaries, Lynne and Sunny. All stood on the sideline, eager for the show. The boys stood in place, sizing Aaron up. Aaron noticed that Patrick’s staff was in his right hand, and Caleb’s was in his left hand. *Interesting.* There was a slight pause. They both released a battle cry, then rushed forward again.

With his left hand, Patrick released a spell that pulled the vines from a hanging plant on his left side. Three vines sprouted out and grew ten times their size, hardening to the density of a rock. Caleb did the same, using his right hand, causing three vines to sprout from a plant on his right side. At the same moment they released the spells for the vines, they each shot a powerful, streaming blaze from their Vel staffs. Patrick had aimed his slightly above Aaron so that he couldn't jump. Caleb had aimed at his knees. The vines from either side were zipping toward Aaron. They covered the space on both sides of him so that he could not dodge left or right. If he stayed in place, he would be hit by both the vines and the blast from Caleb.

Aaron's eyes widened. *WTF?* He only had time to do one thing. He slammed the bottom of his staff into the ground and closed his eyes. When he did, his entire body lit up, and a luminous, protective bubble formed around him. The vines came crashing into the bubble and disintegrated. The zap from Caleb, aimed at his knees, hit the barrier and was absorbed into it, while the blast from Patrick's staff flew over his head.

He stood unrooted, without so much as a flinch. His eyes were still closed. After nearly a minute, he opened his eyes to find Caleb and Patrick, along with the others, standing in front of the bubble. They were cautiously poking at it, just to see what it was made of and how hard it actually was.

"Damn!" Starko had tried to press his finger into it. "That's pretty tough!"

Aaron smiled and released the bubble of energy. "I had nowhere to run, and not enough time to block everything that was coming to me. In those moments, the only thing you can do is surrender." He explained, "That bubble wasn't my creation. It was Father's. I merely let go of everything and said, 'Save me' to him. Then I closed my eyes and let him do whatever he wanted to do."

Everyone remained quiet, absorbing what he just said. Aaron continued, "I realized halfway through our training, as far as fighting goes, I had nothing to give you. It's beyond me how it happened, but both of you completely absorbed and understood the complete fighting system of the magicks of Muruga.

"While standing inside of my barrier, I realized that the one thing I could give you, was exactly what I did. Surrender. When you're screwed, if you surrender, you're never really screwed. Understand?" They both nodded a yes. The girls were taking this in as well, and they simultaneously nodded in agreement.

Caleb asked, "Teacher? Then we did okay?"

"Yeah." Aaron patted him on the back. "You did great. And don't ever call me Teacher again. Second son of Muruga, and third son of Muruga. You have both earned your titles today. From now on, you call me Aaron."

Patrick had a curious look on his face. "I have a question. You said that you can never die. What happens to you if you actually do get hit? I mean, do you scar, or do you just heal?"

"Good question." Aaron's lips twisted a little while he thought about it. "Once in an extremely rare while do I ever get hit. I've stubbed my toe before. That didn't hurt much. I can't really answer that. Just know that it's impossible to kill me. So maybe if I did get hit, it'd just patch up nicely. I mean, look at me. I'm still as pretty as I was 13,782 years ago."

A roaring laughter came from the entire group. When it quieted, Caleb asked, "Can we die?"

Aaron turned serious. "Yes. And no. For now. And what I mean by that? You are the Essence which flows through everything. You are more than a body. You as that, can and never will die. Your body on the other hand, as it is this moment, can die. The mere fact that you question immortality keeps you

from having it. When the day comes that you no longer question it, and you fully believe that dying simply isn't an option, then and only then will you be invincible and immortal. A day will come when this will no longer be an issue. But for now, battle without thinking. Protect, and don't think about the next moment."

Christopher stepped forward. "Both of you used the powers of Gaia and Muruga at the same time. You have complete command and understanding of both systems. I am impressed as well. From this day on, I am simply Christopher to you both."

Edward added, "Your training continues tomorrow. It seems that what you are lacking has nothing to do with battle. What you are lacking is the skill to socialize with people. How to relate with them, read them, empathize with them, and how to heal them. When you learn this, then you will move deeper in the ways of the gods and goddesses."

"This is true," Starko further explained. "Some of the greatest gods never battle. They simply watch, and they simply give to those who just need."

Aaron snickered. "Yup. Ya'll will have to tell me how THAT goes when I get back. I'd love to hear about what happens with bullies and girls and nitpicking at high school. This should be very interesting. Glad I'll miss that one!"

Heather walked up to Patrick. "Um, yeah. About that time when I squeezed your throat at the mall? Let's just kinda forget about that, huh? But hey, I've still got stuff to teach you, like how to talk to a girl or something. Ya know?"

Patrick looked at Gwen and blushed, then turned his gaze downward.

Caleb patted Patrick on the back. "I don't think the girls can beat us up anymore, Patrick. But maybe we can protect them."

“Seriously? Whatever!” Lynne was in his face. “We don’t need your protection. Sure, you can fight. But little boy, we’ve been through our shares of battles too. I wouldn’t mind testing you in a spar. We can see how the lineage of Arul can test the Murugan line.”

“Oh lord.” Gene put his hand to his head.

“Actually, yeah.” Mery stepped in closer. “Maybe some time me ‘n Lynne will take you two on. You can throw all the plants and energy blasts you want. We’ll just zip in and out of other dimensions.”

Aaron turned and said, “Okay. I’ve had enough listening to who probably has the biggest balls here.” He pointed to Patrick and Caleb. “You two can go eat again, then rest. I’m gonna prepare to leave. And by that, I mean, I’m gonna grab my backpack and walk to the front door. If anyone wants to throw a party for me, please do it now.”

Gwen walked up to the two boys. She was speaking to them both, but she was looking at Patrick with a small gleam in her eyes. “You guys fought really well tonight. I was pretty enthralled, actually.”

Patrick could meet her gaze for only a few seconds before turning his head down slightly. “Uh, thanks, Gwen. That’s real nice of you to say.”

Caleb took this in and stared at the two of them. “Ooohh! Ummm, I’ll be in the kitchen. Alone. And you two can be here. Alone.”

The others had already left the hall with Aaron. Christopher was at the side door, waiting for Caleb. He saw Gwen and Patrick standing in the middle of the training room. “Nice move, Caleb.” Caleb grinned.

After Caleb left them alone, Patrick stood next to Gwen, not really knowing what to say. He turned his gaze up to her eyes and smiled shyly, before leaning in and kissing her on the cheek. She smiled at him, then turned her head and gave him a kiss on the lips. There was an awkward silence

between then, until Gwen finally said, “So, we should probably say bye to Aaron, hmmm?”

“Yeah, yeah. We should.”

“Then, later...” She didn’t finish her thought. “Yeah, let’s say bye to Aaron.” They walked silently to the side door, and Gwen put her arm around his waist.

Everyone was already in the front room, saying their goodbyes. Gwen and Patrick arrived, and Gwen still had her arm around him. Heather raised an eyebrow, but didn’t say anything. Although she did nudge Mery, who nudged Lynne.

Aaron gave a quick but heartfelt hug to Starko, Christopher, Gene and the girls. He walked up to Patrick and Caleb and tapped them both on the forehead. “A little gift. This will help in your awakenings. It has less to do with the battle energy, and more to do with wisdom.” The power flooded them both.

He then walked up to Sunny. “I don’t think Thomas would mind if I gave you a little gift also.” He told Sunny, “May you keep your child-like innocence. But may you also be the powerful warrior of the sun, which you are meant to be. My gift to you is two-fold. As a child who looks like an adult, you will now find it very easy to relate to adults. I am also lending you a bit of the authenticity of my battle power. You will know what to do now in battle. This is my decree. It must be, and it cannot be undone.”

Aaron pressed two fingers on Sunny’s forehead. Two very powerful rays of energy poured into Sunny, into his brain and throughout his body. His body convulsed for a few seconds, and his head started to swirl. Aaron took his fingers off and turned around. His back was to Lynne, who was standing next to Sunny. “Catch him, Lynne. He’s about to fall.” Sunny fell over, and Lynne caught him just in time.

To Khenpo and the rest of the former mercenaries, Aaron simply smiled and said, "For hundreds of years, you have practiced magick. Granted, it was a demented and diluted form of magick. But you at least know what to do. You have wonderful teachers, and you're all walking miracles. Your teachers are all you need now. You all are already good. You are very powerful as it is. I have nothing to give you but my gratitude, for being on our side." They were all humbled by Aaron, whom they looked at with starstruck eyes.

Edward was the last for Aaron to say goodbye to. He walked up to Edward and stood in front of him quietly for a few moments. He then slipped his arms around Edward at the waist and lingered for more than a quick moment, staring him in the eyes. Completely stunned, Edward was frozen in place by a strange power. He could not move his arms or legs. In front of everyone, he pulled Edward closely. Without saying a word, he held him tightly for another few moments. Then he leaned in and whispered something in his ear. Edward's face showed nothing. He simply nodded.

Heather raised an eyebrow again. She nudged Mery again, who nudged Lynne.

Aaron released him and turned to everyone. With his staff in hand, he smiled broadly. "I'm heading back to the Far East. Once there, I meet with Christopher's mommy, find my rocks, and then head to Mars."

He addressed Patrick and Caleb. "In time, you two will also be able to travel this way with the Vel staff. When I return, I'll teach you. Something I've noticed, when I zip to Mars and back, I don't get tired. But when I zip from place to place on Earth, I do. But I think it's only cause I'm still getting used to this place. I'm sure a day will come when I can do it without getting tired. It's like getting sick or being immortal. It's purely mental."

He slammed the bottom of the staff on the floor, which caused it to hum, vibrate and glow. "Alright, you two. Please use the power in your staffs now, so that this place isn't blown to shreds."

Patrick and Caleb quickly pulled their staffs out, set their intentions, and released the power. A strong wind formed in the room from Aaron's staff, but the power from the two boys held it at bay. Aaron waved to everyone. He turned one last time to Edward and winked. Then he blinked out in a flash.

Part II: Thomas and Damenion

Thomas walked slowly around the room in a large factory. High windows on either side, and not much dust scattered around. *People have been here on and off, recently.*

He paused. A smirk ran across his face. Slowly, he turned around and stared into an open space where there was only a wall. “So, you gonna come out of there? Cause I can stand here all day if you want. I’ve got food.” He took an apple out of his coat pocket and munched on it casually.

The empty space blurred, and it opened up into a wide oval, with bright beams shooting out from it. Damenion stepped out.

“That’s a pretty foul miasma you just stepped out of. How can you stand it?” Thomas asked him.

“Thomas. We really must stop meeting like this,” Damenion said.

“Why is that? I mean, it’s very comforting for me. As before, I didn’t come to fight. I just wanna talk.”

“Fair enough. And?” Damenion leaned against a beam in the middle of the room.

Thomas stepped back a few steps to put a little distance between them. “Five thousand kids you turned into monsters. I was stunned at first. I’m over it now. I’ve accepted that it happened.”

“I must say, Thomas, I am very impressed at your sleuthing. You have an uncanny way of always tracking me down. Have you ever considered the possibility of joining...”

“Hahahahahahaha! O wait. Hahahahahahaha! No, I’ve never considered joining Moloch. Or you. Or what’s his name that you work for. Life is too beautiful for me to go down that route. You see, I don’t buy into this whole

making people afraid thing, making them run around and see boogedy-boos. It's just not me. But thank you kindly for your consideration." He took another bite of his apple.

"I see. So you are here then just to talk. Gather information from me, hoping I will slip up and accidentally tell you something." There was a hint of contempt in Damenion's voice.

"Oh, Damenion. You know damn well I don't need for you to slip up. I'm gathering information as I eat my apple, and as you talk about accidentally slipping up. It's not about words. It's about how aware I am of my surroundings. What I feel from this place. What I feel from you. And right now, I'm feeling anger, dread and a little fear from you." Thomas finished his apple and tossed the core into a nearby trash can.

Damenion clenched his fists, then steadied his voice and said, "The five thousand children are ready, you know? They're already finished. Twisted so badly in their heads. And every day, we get more. As a matter of fact, we have already added another three thousand. Oh, I'm sorry. A little over three thousand. Using Moloch as a pawn really helps us to move around. He keeps you busy while we do our thing."

Thomas was silent, thoughtful. "You yourself are a pawn, Damenion."
I could take him out now, Father. This would end his streak, would it not?

Inside of his mind, the voice of Surya spoke out to Thomas. "Now is not the right time, Thomas. The three thousand children he has are already in the grips of those who follow him. Ending Damenion here will help nobody. Press him for more information, and the overall picture will be clearer to you. The greater your understanding, the greater your chances are in finding the one who pulls his strings." *I understand, Father.*

"I may be a pawn, but my master is very good to me. I have lived much longer than you, Thomas. I look good, and I am taken care of." There was menace in his voice, despite the praise he gave to his master.

"Perhaps, but your master just sends you all over the world to find newborns and children. You spend all your time traveling from country to country, rounding up kids. Isn't it a little tiring?" Thomas asked.

"We don't have to go all around the world, Thomas. There are so many third world countries that have so many children in the streets. It's almost too easy. As long as I get my work done, I live. And I live well. And I live forever. It seems like a very good trade to me, don't you think so?"

"A bit twisted, but I do see your point. I'm not gonna argue with you about the reasons why you do what you do, Damenion..."

Damenion cut him off. "Let's just get to the point. Let me tip you off. I have too much to do, and I don't need you or your friends getting in my way. Moloch is on the move right now. Ah, but I am not stupid."

Damenion opened the portal from which he came, and he stepped inside and backed into it a good ways. The portal closed halfway. "First, walk to the other end. Then I will tell you what you need to know." He waited.

Thomas walked to the other end and turned around. "Alright. Let's hear it. Ain't no way I can get to you that fast after you tell me."

Damenion shouted from the portal. "Very soon, Moloch will be taking Romania by storm, in Bucharest. He sees fit to find a few good men for his army there, as well as causing destruction and havoc. You know, he is very messy."

"Romania, you say." Thomas pondered his next move.

"Yes, Romania. Just like last time, if you wish to rescue an entire city from his raging cronies, you and your friends, or at least, some of your friends, will go there. Then, I can be on my way to do what I need to do in finishing up

with the three thousand children I have. If you do not go to Romania, then you will see destruction like you've never seen in any war."

"I see. Just like the factory of four hundred children you led us to, when you got away with five thousand kids at another location." Thomas kept his composure. *Father, I suppose we rescue those we can rescue. No more, no less. His plans so far are flawless.* He sighed to himself.

"True," Damenion said. "Just like the factory. Moloch is bait. I hold my conversations with you so that I can rat on Moloch. Moloch takes the plunge, and in the meantime, I get work done for my master so that your group isn't all over me. Prepare, Thomas. This will take place within twenty-four hours."

A small thread of energy fired up inside of Thomas' closed fist.

"Perhaps we will continue our conversation on the battlefield," Damenion said.

"Perhaps," Thomas nodded. "Perhaps."

Damenion turned around and walked on, while the portal started to close. Just as it was about to close, Thomas put his right hand up. A very thin stream of light shot out from his palm and entered into the portal, attaching itself to the very front of it. The portal closed.

Thomas stood in place with his eyes closed, the string of light still attached to the portal. *He's nowhere near Earth! Where the hell did he go?* "Doesn't matter. I've got the traces of energy. I can find where he went later." He searched the entire factory and the surrounding premises.

He found piles of children's clothing and trash cans filled with old food, stuff kids would probably eat. *Five thousand kids. And more on the way. I can't lay a hand on him though. Not until we find out more.*

Part III: Aaron's Whisper

Edward lay in bed, pondering on the recent events. Aaron had only been gone for two hours. "Father. It's so easy to get sucked into the world and all the thinking that goes with it. I know I'm a free soul, but at the same time, I'm feeling really annoyed. I'm having trouble putting my finger on it, or putting it into words."

"Edward." His father's voice was always an eerie echo. It soothed him whenever he heard the voice. "You are right. You are the epitome of freedom. A fully realized being you are. Inhabiting a human shell, wandering the Earth, you hear the thoughts of humanity. You feel their cries piercing into you. In a sense, it weighs heavily upon you. This, however, is not what is annoying you."

"Well." Edward fidgeted in bed. "As a god who is always free of torturing thoughts and karmas, is it still possible to feel loneliness?"

"My son. You are larger than life, and you are life itself. However, in the physical world, it is your duty to show the mortal-minded a way out of their personal tortures. It is your duty to do whatsoever is necessary in order to show them that happiness exists, whether it is in relationships, finances, their bodies, their spiritual development or all of them. Human beings incarnate for two specific purposes. The first purpose is to find bonding in relationships, whether it is familial, in brotherhood, or in romance. The second purpose is to find themselves, to know Life. You, my son, have already found yourself. You incarnated for different reasons. Reasons of a god.

"Everything I mentioned is an aspect of spirituality and growth. If there are feelings of longing and loneliness within you, it is only because I placed them there. If something should sprout from the seeds of which I planted, know that it will serve to show humanity a way to grow. A god only incarnates into a

human body so that he or she can have human experiences, solely for the purpose of helping humans, and of course, all species, helping them to grow, even if it is only a little bit.”

“I’m just saying,” Edward replied. “Because tonight, something happened to me. Something that I’ve never before felt. The son of Muruga. He... he stirred something in me.” There was no reply. Edward sighed. *Yeah, I know. Til next time, Father.*

For nearly half an hour, he lay motionless, thinking about the end of the night, right before Aaron disappeared. Aaron had grabbed him tightly but gently and had held him in a way he had never before done. A strange power had held Edward rooted in place, and he could not move. He thought about it more. *I couldn’t move? Or I didn’t wanna move? I couldn’t move, because I didn’t want to? What?*

Aaron had whispered into his ear. “When I return, we will walk as one, into the night, into the day. When gods come into the world, they become a part of the world.” Edward’s body, his face showed no emotion at the time. He only nodded, knowing that he didn’t fully understand Aaron’s words, but that the understanding would come later. He knew the words from Aaron were more than words. They felt like a command. Now, his entire being, his thoughts and his body were consumed with emotion and feeling.

But the longing, Father. The longing for Aaron. It feels so real. I’ve never... I’ve never had this before. Is it that I’m scared? No. That’s not it. What then is it?

He kept thinking. Thinking, thinking, thinking. “Me and Christopher and Gene. We’re like brotherly consorts. We bonded in such a way that the flow of power is heightened when we’re together. But... but the son of Muruga. This... this is different.” His thoughts slowed, and it finally dawned on him. He

whispered to his father. "Is that what you are asking of me? But... but what you are suggesting, Father..."

His father's voice boomed out. "What I am suggesting has already been commanded by the authorities of Myself and the Murugan Overlord of Mars. The role which you are about to play was willed thousands of years ago. You cannot help but feel what you feel for the first son of Muruga. You are an actor in an elaborate play, which was written before you stepped foot on Earth the very first time. For a play to be successful, all actors must experience, feel and live the emotion of each individual scene in the moment. This is why you feel what you feel."

"My destiny then, Father, is to leave the sides of my brothers, Christopher and Gene, and walk hand in hand with... with the son of Muruga?" Edward was shocked. "Father, that's just crazy. That's lunacy." At the same time, he was relieved. He knew what he was feeling. It was real.

His father replied. "The son of Muruga has waited a long time for you. For a very long time he has known that the power he was to be entwined with, was born from the line of Kala Bhairava. In the beginning, he did not take kindly to this. He only wished to walk alone. For thousands of years, his anger over this decision kept him at bay, away from you."

Edward remained silent.

"On the outside, the son of Muruga has been formed into a male shell. On the outside, the son of Bhairava has been formed into a male shell. It is of no concern. However, in the mortal world, a great war of the minds has arisen for this very reason. Mortals wage war against mortals for petty reasons. It is up to the gods to show them that their mortal reasonings have no bearing in True Reality."

“And so, it has already been commanded?” asked Edward. “Aaron and I are to be entwined by the heart, and at the deepest levels, so that we can lead by example?”

“Your questions,” his father said, “are your answers.”

“I- I don’t... I don’t even know what I’m trying to say. Is my life, as it is, not as you want it, or not good enough?”

“Edward,” his father said, “all facets of life, as you know, change. Who you are as a free spirit, as a god, is perfect in every way. It is, however, the outside experiences which change. The greatest gods and masters in all of history must adapt and move with the times, in order to teach the peoples of the day. Words do not teach. Your silent power, coupled with examples of how you lead your life, is what teaches.”

“I am not opposed to this, Father. I am just stunned. All the while, I can’t stop thinking about him. I just... I just need to adjust, that’s all.”

“The time has come to fulfill the destiny which was willed eons ago. You are to experience the divine romance of a consort, so that you can better understand people and help them to grow and transform. It has been willed. Take comfort in the fact that you have been willed to another god. For some gods, in times past, were willed and interwoven with mortal minds.”

He thought for a moment. *Can it be?? Is this why I already miss him? Have I ever missed anyone, besides Christopher or Gene, as brotherly consorts? No. Beyond that? No.*

He lay motionless and thoughtless for a few minutes. *This entire night, I haven’t been able to stop thinking about him.* He sighed. *Be safe, Aaron. At least you can’t die.*

He relaxed and sat up in bed. Locking his hands together, he spoke a charm. It was a low whisper, the eight names of his father. “Asidanga. Guru. Chanda. Kroda. Unmatta. Kapala. Bhishana. Samhara.”

A pause. A few deep breaths. “May this blessing go to Aaron, son of Muruga, for anything he needs in this moment.” He fell back onto his pillow, content, and his eyes closed.

Thousands of Miles Away

Aaron was resting on a rock inside of a cave, wiped out from his journey through dimensions. He was a short distance from Caleb’s old village in the Himalayas, although none of the villagers knew he was there.

He felt the resonation from the vortex that he and Edward had created. “Hmmm... Because of that vortex of energy, I shouldn’t need to rest as long. Maybe a few more hours, then...”

He was cut off in mid-sentence when a powerful surge rushed into him. His body rocked backed and forth. His eyes burned for a second, and the numbness in his legs went away.

A vision passed through his mind. He saw Edward sitting on his bed, and he heard him whispering the names of his father. A stream of energy from the Otherworlds, connected to Edward’s heart, had blasted into him.

Aaron sat up. He was no longer tired. A joyful laughter filled the cave. He was nimble, filled with excitement again. “Thank you, Edward. Thank you so much.” He shook his head in amusement. “After thousands of years, you finally understand. Finally.”

He bowed his head. The power inside of him swirled, and the staff in his hands lit up brightly. Streams of white, red and gold shot through the top of the cave and through the sky. Thousands of miles it traveled, arcing to where Edward lay on his bed. The powerful rays shot through the roof of Starko’s home, and gushed into the heart center of Edward’s chest.

There was an instant connection from the son of Muruga to the son of Kala Bhairava. Edward was immediately immobile and transfixed. And there before him was Aaron, as if he was standing at the foot of the bed.

Aaron spoke to him very slowly and soothingly. "My beautiful. If you only knew what I have been through to get to you, you would know, even in your dreams, just how much I really need you."

Edward could only gaze at the apparition of Aaron, which seemed so very real. "Aaron?"

"The thousands of years I walked alone. It was well worth the wait, for the two lineages of Muruga and Kala Bhairava will soon be tied together. A great power will be forged from this unification. Sleep now."

Edward's eyes were heavy, and his breathing slowed. He tried to speak, his words barely audible. "How do... how do you always seem to have power over me?"

Aaron came closer and put his hand on Edward's forehead. Although he was miles away, it felt as if his hand was resting there. A peaceful wave entered into Edward. He spoke softly and kindly. "Subconsciously, you always gave in to me, whether you knew it or not. And I always gave into you. When we were together at the beach in California, you could not help but give in to me. You stayed with me for as long as you could, and you didn't even know why. You let me trek the world with you, and you couldn't say no. Realize that it has worked both ways. I cannot help but give in to you either. I accept this, and I am happy for this.

"When we see each other, surrender happens to us in a way we have never before experienced. This is why I have power over you. This is why you have power over me. It is, in fact, our power. Sleep now."

Edward's eyes were closed. It took nearly all his strength to open them up. When he did, he saw the intense and peaceful gaze from Aaron. The corner of Edward's mouth creased up into a smile, and he whispered, "Okay."

He shut his eyes again. He saw two flames in his mind's eye. It was the Murugan lineage and the lineage of Kala. The flames melted into each other and became one flame. He fell asleep and started to dream.

Part IV: Edward's Dream

Edward was completely out. A peaceful expression upon his face, and his entire body was fully relaxed. The light body of Aaron still stood above him, with his hand still resting on Edward's forehead. Aaron silently watched him for a few moments. He whispered softly. "Sleep. Sleep peacefully, my love. Dream through my eyes. You will see and know. It was foretold that you and I would come into existence and form an unbroken bond of the heart. Sleep, and see."

Aaron knelt down to be a little closer. He brushed the side of Edward's hair. "You were right, Father. I was against this from the very beginning. But you were both right. He is powerful. He is kind. He is compassionate. And... and he is the most beautiful creature I have ever laid eyes on. You were right, Father. I grew tired of walking alone. But the day I stepped foot on Earth, I knew I had to do everything I could to find this great being."

"Thousands of years, my son. You walked alone," his father replied. "It took you that long to change your mind and surrender to my will, and the will of Edward's father. Only through the merging will you see and feel the sheer power of this unification, and the ability it has for the transformation of mortals."

Aaron was silent. Content. He was still kneeling close by, staring at Edward while he slept. He leaned in very close and pressed his forehead against the side of Edward's head. For nearly ten minutes he remained pressed up against him, not wanting to move. He then kissed both of Edward's eyelids, before kissing him softly on the cheek. He kept his lips pressed to Edward's cheek for another minute, his eyes closed the entire time. Aaron opened his eyes and leaned in a little closer. He pressed his lips gently against the lips of Edward. He then lifted his head and stared at his divine consort.

“Lordy, lord, lord,” he whispered softly. “I could do this all night to you, Edward. But then you’d wake up with a bunch of light-apparition slobber all over your face. If that’s even possible.” He sighed, not wanting to get up or leave, and he ran his fingers through Edward’s hair. *But I have to, my love.*

“When I return. Now dream.” He gently placed his palm on Edward’s forehead, and Edward started dreaming through the eyes of Aaron.

The light body of Aaron disappeared.

9000 Years Ago

Edward shifted slightly in his sleep. He was staring through the eyes of Aaron, as though he was Aaron. He was seeing and living everything Aaron had seen and lived in times past. Standing on a rock on some distant planet he had never heard of, Aaron and he looked up. There were monstrous beasts flying above. Three of them swooped down, and fire poured from their open mouths.

Aaron’s arm moved swiftly, and a barrier of light from the Vel staff went up. The fire was deflected, and he angled it in such a way that it shot back to the beasts in the air. They burned. Very quickly, he jumped into the air and sliced through the remaining beasts. Smoke and char everywhere. A burnt city to the left and cries of mourn in the distance. He shook his head. “Father, this is wrong. It’s just wrong.”

“Son of Muruga, it all happens as it should. Be there now. Do what you can.”

1000 Years Later

The scene shifted. He was on another planet. It was cold, but that did not bother him. *Alone. Again. This is nice. This is how it should be for me. The ultimate warrior. I work alone.*

These were Aaron's thoughts, but it was as if Edward himself was thinking them. A crackle of thunder, and the dark sky opened up. Aaron shielded his eyes and scrunched down. Two powerful beams of light shot down and landed thirty feet from where he was standing.

Edward recognized one of them. It was his father. But his father was talking to him as if he was Aaron. The other was Aaron's father. Aaron immediately got down on one knee and bowed. "Son of Muruga," the great Kala Bhairava stated. "Rise."

Aaron stood up. Edward felt his heart pumping, the exhilaration and elation of Aaron, as he stood before two of the greatest gods.

Kala Bhairava continued. "We have come this very day to proclaim your union with my child."

The color in Aaron's face drained, and he stared at them, confused. "M- my lord?" he stammered. "With all due respect, I... I don't want anyone. Surely, I have no need of anyone. I've been alone for thousands of years. I work alone. I fight alone. I teach alone. This is how it has always been, and this is how it must always be."

Aaron's father stepped closer. "My son. This proclamation has been given to you this very day, specifically for this reason. I know you best, which is why we decided to tell you now. You will have much time to ponder this. In fact, you will have slightly over 8000 years to ponder what we have told you this day."

"What?!" The heat in Aaron rose. Edward felt his anger. "Father, you're springing this on me now, and telling me that I'm to wed his child 8000 years from now? Are you CRAZY?!"

The Murugan god remained calm, patient. "As I stated, I calculated the exact time you would need to ponder this. You will first need to overcome your anger. As time passes in the next 8000 years, you will grow weary of

being alone. Mission after mission you will complete, always alone. After your anger and your weariness, then you will finally succumb to acceptance. You will finally surrender to our words.”

Kala Bhairava spoke. “And lastly, the time will come when you begin looking forward to the very day of when you meet my son.”

“Your... your SON?!” Aaron’s eyes glazed over.

“My son, yes. In the coming years, he will be known by many names. Like you, he is a great warrior. When your paths cross on Earth, you will know him as Edward.”

Muruga stepped forward and placed his hand on his son. “We have spoken. Think. Ponder. Everything changes. Everything on the mortal planes, and everything in the Otherworlds.” A blinding light and a loud BOOM! Kala Bhairava and Muruga were gone.

Aaron kicked the dirt in front of him. He screamed and shot a blasting light from his Vel staff that knocked over a strange looking tree Edward had never before seen.

“Anger, huh?! You’re god-damn right I’m angry, Father! And you think I want your piss-ant son?! I WORK ALONE!”

4000 Years Later

Mission after mission, Edward watched through Aaron’s eyes. Creatures, demons and worlds he had never before seen. He awoke and found himself sleeping on a matted floor in some village on some distant world. The past 4000 years proved the words of Muruga, as it took that long for Aaron to overcome the anger.

The light from two suns was pouring into the room. A calming sensation washed over his body. He was breathing deeply while grasping the handle of his staff. A change. It was the first time in thousands of years that he

had not felt the anger. His eyes closed, and opened. Closed, and opened. Breathing. “Well there you go, Father. You can now say ‘I told you so,’ and I’ll accept that. I think I can actually say I’m no longer pissed.”

Aaron stood up, yawned and stretched. “I actually feel very good.” Edward knew that Aaron was looking forward to his mission. He walked out of the hut and the image blurred.

3000 Years Later

Many more missions had occurred. Edward saw them all. They were speeding images in his dream. He lived them as Aaron had lived them. By this time, he had learned and memorized the fighting style of Aaron. He knew his every move. He knew his deepest thoughts and deepest secrets. Aaron had allowed him to see every aspect of his life, every aspect of him. He had become an open book to Edward.

He awoke in a cave on Mars. Alone. Always alone. A huge battle had taken place in a different galaxy, and Aaron had come to his home planet to rest. It was quiet and desolate. He stared at the walls of the cave. A rush of emotion came up, and a tear streaked down his cheek. Another tear, until he cried for almost an hour. “Father.” His voice was barely a whisper. “I dropped my anger. For many years, I was still content and wanted to be alone. I’ve seen more worlds and have battled, perhaps more than any other god.

“I... but today... I wake up, and there is a dread in me. This cave feels hauntingly alone to me. I have never before felt this. Wh- why am I feeling this? I’m... I’m weary. Just as you both said I would be. How did you know? Why?”

1000 Years Later

He was a flying rocket, a shooting star, and he landed on Earth. One day had passed since his arrival.

He was sitting on a rock deep in the mountains in Northern California. An excitement, a thrilling surge spiraled through his body. He voiced aloud. "This... this is it! This is the planet, is it not?! Ed- Edward?"

Jumping from the rock, he ran, never tiring, until he found the nearest town. Aaron looked at all the newspapers and spoke with the locals. He was giddy, charming and changed. "Yes! This is definitely the place. I just needed to make sure I'm not crazy."

Aaron walked around and around, exploring everything. "Edward." He said the name again, this time with a big smile on his face. "Edward. Hullo, Edward."

He rolled his eyes at himself. "AAAaaahh! That's just stupid! Is he even expecting me? Does he even know about me?"

A coffee stand. *What's that?* He walked toward the stand, not knowing what to ask for. He read the menu, and the girl behind the counter asked him, "What can I get you?"

"I, ummm, what's good? Oh wait, never mind." *No money.* "I uh, just realized that I left my money at home."

He turned around and took a few steps. A man placed his hand on his shoulder and said, "Wait. Get him a coffee. Cream and sugar okay?" Aaron nodded.

The man introduced himself as Matthew. "No reason a kid should go hungry or be deprived of the basic necessities in life, like coffee."

Aaron nodded and smiled and introduced himself. He was still lost in thought over Edward. *I'm here. I'm finally here. And... and he'll be here too.*

Matthew was looking at him strangely, as Aaron was still lost in thought. "Oh sorry! Silly me! Thank you for the drink. I'll make sure the gods shine upon you and that you are always safe, and that good luck will always come to you."

Matthew coughed up a little coffee. Aaron winced and slapped his own forehead. *O lord. I didn't just say that. Focus, Aaron.*

The scene blurred, and Edward awoke, his heart racing at record speed. With all his might and inner will, he resisted the urge to use the gift that Aaron had given to him. It was the gift that would bring Aaron to his side with just a single thought. "I... I could. All I gotta do is scream out to him. He'll... he'll hear it and be here in a second."

Sweat and tears rolled down Edward's cheeks. His body was shaking, and he clenched his fists. "Damn!" His right hand opened, and a stream of light shot out, burning the wood at the end of his bed. "It's... it's not an emergency. But it damn near feels like it is, Aaron. I can't pull you away from your mission."

Breathing very hard, he wiped his face on his bed sheet, then sank back into the bed. "I've never felt this lonely in my life," he whispered. "I didn't even know it was possible for gods to feel this way."

I need him back here.

CHAPTER 4

Part I: First Day of School

4 Days Before Winter Solstice

Patrick looked at his schedule.

Period 1	Choir
Period 2	English
Period 3	History
	Lunch
Period 4	Algebra
Period 5	Science
Period 6	Athletics

He made a croaking sound and looked at Caleb. “I can’t believe I’m back in school. They stuck me in a choir class. Choir?! Really?!”

“Well, since you don’t play anything, you couldn’t be in Band. And between Choir and Home Ec? I got it too, so quit complaining. Mine’s second hour, though.”

“Alright, whatever.” Patrick stuffed his schedule in his pocket. “Aaron says we have to do this. And Starko and everyone backed him up on it. So let’s just do this. I’d rather be at home, training.”

“You mean making out with Gwen?” Caleb poked him in the chest.

“Yeah, that too.”

They bumped fists and took off in different directions. Patrick rushed past a herd of students and climbed the stairs to the second floor. He had a confident strut about him that he didn’t realize he was doing. He waltzed into the music room and took a seat in the back.

Everyone was already seated, and he was the last in the room. “Everyone, meet Patrick Elliott.” Mr. Howser glanced in his direction.

“Yo,” Patrick murmured.

“He was strutting when he came in here.” A thin, Asian girl with long black hair was slumped in her chair. She managed to pull a few laughs from some of the other kids.

“I wasn’t strutting.”

“Ahem!” The teacher gave a stern look at Carli, then to Patrick. “Actually, yes, you were strutting. Not that it has anything to do with music, Carli. Now keep it quiet.”

Patrick raised his hand, and the teacher gave a nod. “What do I call you? I mean, like, your name?”

“Mr. Howser or Mr. H. is fine. Anything else, and we’ve got a problem.” He looked through his notes. “It says here you have a brother who will be with me next hour?”

“Yeah, my half-bro, Caleb.”

“Alright. We’re in the middle of preparations for a holiday concert in two days. So unless you have an amazing ability to sing and memorize, you’re going to have to fake it. The class has been preparing for several months.”

Mr. H. gave him the music. He had never read music before, but he did not admit that to the teacher. He read the words on the page, while the choir started up. Patrick closed his eyes and zeroed in on every nuance he could pick up. He felt the Vel staff in his backpack vibrate, and a power was released into him. For several minutes he listened. Everything made complete sense to him. He opened his eyes and stared at the music staff and notes on the page. *WTF? Why does all of this make sense to me?*

A voice rang out in his head. “The ability to learn, understand and know any language is at your grasp. Within minutes, you have learned the language of music. What takes others years, you can do in minutes.”

Patrick’s eyes widened. *Father?*

The music stopped, and Mr. H. clapped the rhythms out. “Start again, this time at measure seventeen. I’ll give you two bars up front on the piano.” The piano played, and Patrick came in with everyone else. The girl next to him gave him a thumbs up. His voice was in tune, and he had perfect time.

The teacher noticed him singing and stopped the music. He was curious. “Back row only, from Cole down to Patrick.” He started the music again and listened intently. He picked out Patrick’s voice from the rest. It was very pure, resonant. Every word was crisp and in tune. *And damn near perfect.* He stopped the music again. “Patrick, by yourself.”

The music started, and Patrick came in all alone. The other kids looked almost enchanted by his voice. He had seen the words once already. He did not need them anymore. His eyes were closed, and he was singing from memory. A few ad libs here and there, and he turned the song into a Pop song. Silence. Mr. H. had a penetrating look about him. Patrick opened his eyes. “Did I do something wrong?”

“No. As a matter of fact, you didn’t. Effective as of now, I’m turning this piece into a solo for you on the concert. Everyone will sing on the Chorus, but the Verses, just you. You can be here that evening, on Wednesday?”

“I ummm, I have to ask my parents. I mean, I don’t think it’d be a problem.”

“Okay, good. Can your brother sing?” Mr. Howser stared intently at him.

“I don’t know. I mean, yeah, he’s okay. I’ll talk with him before class.”

Class ended. Patrick made a few friends and exchanged numbers so they could text him. He waited for Caleb, who finally came running up the steps. Patrick told him what happened and how he learned music within minutes.

Caleb laughed. "Oh yeah! Remember? That's how I learned English!"

"Okay, yeah." Patrick rubbed his face and let out a long breath. "I'm still a lil weirded out. I gotta get to class. See you soon."

Lunchtime rolled around, and the two boys sat at a table a few feet down from a few students who regularly hung out together. Caleb picked up a roll from his plate and slathered butter on it. "You should've seen the teacher's face when he heard me sing! He thinks we're like prodigies or something!"

"I guess we are, in a way." Patrick scratched the side of his head. "I mean, we both picked it up real fast. That's what a prodigy does, huh? Whatever. I'm just hungry." They took a few bites of their food and Patrick winced. "It's okay, I guess? But this is grub compared to the stuff Starko feeds us."

Three choir students walked up to their table and sat down. Carli, a thin and wiry boy, and a blonde-headed girl. The boy stuck a handful of fries in his mouth, and said in a muffled voice, "Mr. H. is like totally raving about you guys. Your voice as good as his?" He nodded at Caleb.

"Oh, well, I don't know. Mr. H. seemed to like it. I'm Caleb, by the way."

"Cole. That's Carli and Erin." Cole looked around, nervous. "If you haven't noticed by now, this school can be a little cliquish."

Patrick didn't say anything. He knew what that meant. His thoughts turned back to when he was still in school, picking on other kids, then dropping out and running around with a ruthless bunch.

"What do you mean?" asked Caleb.

Carli answered, "Well, you have the cheerleaders and athletes over there. A bunch of computer geeks and gamers there. The music and choir geeks. Then there's a crew that don't fit in with anybody. They're like misfits, and they tend to make life for others crappy at times. They don't mess with the athletes much, cause they'll fight back, but everyone else is fair game."

"I see." Caleb smiled stabbed at his mac 'n cheese. "I'll be sure to stay clear of them then." Patrick coughed as he tried to contain his laughter.

"Yeah." Cole seemed anxious. "The gamers, goths and emos get it mostly. But sometimes it's not enough for them. So those guys head over to the musicians, so they have somebody to mess with."

"Lemme guess," said Patrick. "Bandanas, blue colors, red colors?"

"That sounds about right," Erin said. "But we shouldn't bore you with all this negativity on your first day, now should we?"

"It's all good," answered Caleb. "As long as there's food, it's all good."

A bell rang, and lunch was over. The next two classes went smoothly for them both. The last hour, Athletics, they had together. Two coaches led this class. One taught martial arts and yoga, while the other was in charge of the basketball, football and track programs.

Everyone had to run laps for the first five minutes, followed by light stretching. Afterward, the class was split up, and the students went to work with their respective teachers. Patrick and Caleb both shrugged and walked toward the martial arts and yoga teacher. Patrick leaned in closely and whispered to Caleb. "We ummm, should probably play dumb. You know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I know. I was thinking the same thing. Dumbing ourselves down in martial arts is still better than shooting a basketball around."

"Any day," Patrick agreed.

The instructor led them through a series of movements, followed by various punches and kicks. Over and over, the class clumsily practiced the

movements. Caleb whispered, "He's actually not bad, the instructor. He seems like he could be at black belt level."

"Which is like puke green belt compared to Aaron," Patrick answered.

"The two new students, who happen to be brothers!" The instructor singled them out. "Why don't you both come up here and demonstrate? Since you seem to have trouble keeping it down, maybe you've already perfected the movements?"

"Awe, man. Damn." Caleb looked at Patrick.

Patrick put his arms in the air and shook his head from side to side. "It's okay. Sorry! We'll shut up!"

"No, no," the instructor said. "Come up here. Now."

Caleb glanced at Patrick, who nodded and shrugged. They walked to the front. The instructor gave them both a hard stare. "In a real dojo, there is absolutely zero talking. We bow to the mat and to each other. And if a student is talking through class, there are varying punishments."

Before he realized what he was saying, Patrick blurted out, "Well, we can be thankful this ain't a real dojo then." *Awe, damn.* The class snickered, but quickly shut up when the instructor shot them a look.

"Let's see how well you have it down, shall we?" He placed Patrick and Caleb next to each other and called off the movements.

At first, they slowed down their movements and tried to make their bodies look awkward and off-balance. But something clicked in them both at the same time, and they immediately fell in sync with each other. Their thoughts stopped, and their bodies were on autopilot, moving on their own by some powerful force of energy. It could not be helped.

They knew this form of fighting already. It was the simplified version of the real form. The simplicity of it fell away and was replaced by the most complex version, taught only by grand masters who hand-selected the very

best students. Their bodies twisted and turned, and instead of sparring with an unseen partner, they turned to face each other. When Patrick kicked high, Caleb ducked. When Caleb kicked high, Patrick ducked. Back and forth they went.

It was a dance between the two, and their motions were so fast that it was sometimes a blur to the instructor and the students. The entire class, including those playing basketball, stopped and were crowded around to watch. All were speechless. At one point, Patrick released a battle cry and came full force at Caleb in a flurry of punches and roundhouse kicks, all of which Caleb easily blocked and dodged. Then, Patrick's leg snapped straight up and came straight down on Caleb. Caleb caught it and pushed the energy back, causing Patrick to flip backward.

It was Caleb's turn. He too released the battle cry of Muruga and rushed forward on the offensive, repeating the same exact moves that Patrick had done. It ended with Patrick catching his leg and flipping him backward.

They bowed slowly to each other, right before coming out of the semi-trance they were in. At first, silence. Then all the students erupted in a mad cheer. Patrick and Caleb put their heads down. They knew they had accidentally screwed up. The bell rang, and they hurried and gathered their clothes and booked it out of the school, before any of the students or instructors could speak with them.

When they reached home, Patrick explained to everyone what happened, but mostly addressed Christopher. "Christopher, it was like, we couldn't help it. Something took over our bodies, and we both just got lost in the motions. We can't have that happening."

Christopher thought for a second. "I don't think that'll happen much longer. The energies from two lineages have taken root in both of you. It's

infiltrating your systems so potently and in an alarmingly fast rate. Once it balances out over time and you become used to it, you'll be able to control it."

"What if we would've hurt someone?" Caleb asked.

Christopher shook his head. "That's impossible. The energies are extremely intelligent. Your bodies moved on its own for a reason, whatever that reason is. The more you're grounded in those energies, the faster you'll be able to bridge the gap to controlling it. The intelligence provided a way for you to be immersed in it, and it gave the students a showing, for whatever purpose it had in mind. Who knows, but it's nothing to dawdle on. Just forget about it for now and get ready for training. Then you can have your dinner and rest."

Patrick shrugged at Caleb. "Well that went better than I thought it would."

Part II: Second Day of School

They entered the school as quietly as possible, trying not to attract any attention, while waiting for their first classes to begin. The students had other ideas, however. Both Caleb and Patrick were mobbed on opposite sides of the school by different groups of kids who heard about their sensational abilities to sing and “kick ass” (according to one girl).

One day, and they had become the talk of the school. Caleb was overwhelmed by so many of them, asking him the same questions over and over, and putting their hands on his shoulders as if he was some kind of star. *I can't believe this. Aaron will come back and kick our asses if he sees what's going on.*

That familiar voice pierced into his mind, as he stood amidst a group of chattering kids. “Second son of Muruga. Your power to attract is uncanny. Now that you have the attention, do not shy away. Meet them energetically, in your words and in your gaze. Relate to them. You will see the transformation in others, when you see it in yourself.”

Father? He shook his head a bit and rubbed his temples after his father had spoken. Two kids from the choir class were standing next to him asking him how long he had been singing. He wondered how long they were standing there.

“Oh, well, we've been training our voices on and off for a while. I heard your voices yesterday. You both sounded really good too.” Caleb smiled really big at them.

“Yeah?” asked the boy, Aldous.

“For reals. I think anybody can sing and do whatever they want. You both have great voices. You know, we’re all still working and learning.” Caleb was doing his best. It worked.

He saw the gleam in both their eyes. They nodded and said, “Yeah, you’re right. That’s cool.” They seemed more confident, now that somebody seemed to believe in them and actually seemed to care.

He felt good about this and walked with them down the hall until they had to split to go to different classes. “See you next hour!” Caleb yelled out.

“Yeah, man!”

Lunch Time

The first three classes flew by for them both. They met at the cafeteria and got their food. After eating, Caleb wanted to stay and chat with some of the new kids he had met. Patrick wanted to walk around and explore the school.

“A’ight bro, I guess I’ll see you in Athletics.” He took off walking. He had thirty minutes to spare and just strolled up and down the halls until he stood at the entrance to the gym. Boys and girls were running around, some shooting hoops, some just sitting around chatting, waiting for the next class to start. He saw Cole taking a shortcut through the gym to get to the next hallway over. Four older and much bigger kids were sneaking up behind him.

When Cole heard them laugh, his arms jerked and two books fell on the floor. He tried to pick them up, but one of the boys kicked it to the side like a soccer ball.

“Oh, come on!” Cole yelled.

“Oh, come on!” the older boy mimicked in a high-pitched tone. “Come on, Cole! We’re just havin’ fun. We haven’t reached our fun quota for the day yet.”

Patrick stayed put for a moment, soaking it all up. He noticed the martial arts instructor in his office. He had seen what happened to Cole, and he was staring out his window. *Probably waiting to see if I'll do anything.*

He had a vision of Aaron and the gift of wisdom he had given to him and Caleb the night he left. A voice inside of his head rang out. "It is not all about battle."

Father. Patrick walked toward Cole and the other four, whom he judged to be seniors. Ragged jeans, a blue bandana on one of them, silver studded wrist bands on another, and just one really big guy.

"Hey Cole!" Patrick waved his hand. "What's up?"

Cole was a little frantic. He looked at the four guys, then back at Patrick. "I'm just headin' to my locker."

"New friend, Cole?" It was the one with the blue bandana. "Makes sense. He's all scrawny and wiry like you."

"Yeah, actually. I'm Patrick. We have a choir class together. Oh, I see you're in a gang. Nice."

"What? Dude, you just said the wrong thing!"

"Well, if you're gonna advertise it, why shouldn't people talk about it? I mean, I've been in a gang before. But now I just sing."

Cole heard about his fighting skills from the other students, but he was still shaking. Out of the corner of his eye, Patrick saw that the instructor was standing at the doorway of his office, watching.

"You? A gang? Dude, you just said the wrong thing again."

"Yes, a gang." Patrick shrugged like it was no big deal. "I know every single one of the territories around here, from the north end down through Humboldt Park and past it. But I don't much pay attention to it anymore. It was a stupid life for me. Like I said, I just sing now."

Patrick glanced at Cole. "You ready, Cole? I was heading that way too." He took a few steps closer to Cole, nonchalantly.

"Wait." It was the bigger guy. "Ain't he the one who did that freak show of Karate with his brother yesterday?"

"Oh, well, yeah, that was us. We were just messin' around. Ready, Cole?"

"Yeah." Cole was visibly shaken up. "I'm ready."

The guy with the blue bandana was fuming. When Patrick and Cole were walking off, he yelled out, "Watch yourself!"

Their backs were turned, and they were talking as they walked. The guy with the bandana was not done, though. Somehow, he had gotten hold of a baseball from a side room in the gym. He reared back and threw it. It was a dead-on shot, aimed right at Patrick's head. At the last second, Patrick whirled around and caught the ball with his bare hand. He gently rolled it back to the guy. "Oh, sorry. I think this is your ball. Here you go." He turned back around and kept walking with Cole.

The instructor saw everything, but he did not say anything. He just smiled and nodded at Patrick, who smiled and nodded back.

Cole was wide-eyed. "WTF?! How'd you do that?! You were in a gang, but now you just sing?! What the hell's that all about?!"

"Hahahahahaha! Well, it made for a good story anyway, whether it's true or not. Besides, you're safe and sound at your locker now, right? Those guys do that to you every day?"

Cole was embarrassed. "Not every day. Most days though. I mean, I can't really do anything about it."

"Hmmm, I wonder if that's really true or not. My thought is that you aren't as confident as you can be, and they feel that from you. If that feeling's

stripped from you and replaced by a feeling of confidence, you'd have a different result."

Cole grimaced. "Whatever. But thanks for saving my ass. Today, anyway. I mean, you can't be around all the time."

"But I can train you," Patrick replied.

"Yeah, to sing or fight?"

"Neither. Just to drop the lack of self-confidence. That's all. It'll work. After school, me and my brother and you. Thirty minutes. That's all we can spare, cause we go home at night and do our own training in martial arts. But I guarantee they won't go after you anymore. We do this for the rest of the week, before the break, k?"

Cole looked a little skeptical. "Alright, whatever. After school." *At least I won't be picked on with them around.*

After School

Patrick explained to Caleb what had happened earlier in the day, and of their meeting with Cole.

Caleb asked him, "Seriously? What do you have in mind? We don't even know what to do! I mean, I know how to do all this stuff, but we've never transferred the training to others. We just GOT the training ourselves."

"I honestly don't know." Patrick was leaning against the building. He had a grin on his face. "I figured, you know, when we get into the mojo, we always seem to link up and get in sync. And from there, the power is like really huge. Why don't we link up and then try and figure out a way to link up with Cole?"

"It could work."

“Hey guys.” Cole walked up to them. “I can’t believe I said yes to this. This is just dumb as hell. I’d rather you just teach me to sing better. Besides, it’s freakin’ cold out here.”

Patrick and Caleb cracked up, which seemed to ease Cole up. “Let’s go over there, to the football field.” Patrick pointed. They walked a short distance. Cole’s teeth were chattering from the cold. The “brothers” barely noticed it, since their magick was keeping them warm. Finally, they were out of eyesight from everyone.

“I have an idea. Hear me out,” Patrick told him. “Let me and my brother do our thing. It’ll only take us a few seconds. I just want you to change your thoughts and feelings.”

“So now you’re a therapist also?” Cole asked sarcastically.

“Nope. Better than that. I want you to change your thoughts to, ‘I’ll be fine. I’ll always be okay.’ Just think about how it relates to the bullying.”

“You’re serious? If I don’t, you guys’ll like kick my ass then, right?”

“Hahahahaha! That’s pretty funny, Cole.” Caleb smacked him on the shoulder. “Yes, he’s serious. Just try it. If it doesn’t work, it doesn’t work. If it does, then there you go. But close your eyes when you do it. It will help.”

“Yeah, fine.” Cole concentrated on that one thought. His eyes were closed. Every now and then, he opened them up, only to see Patrick and Caleb with their hands at their own heart centers. Their eyes were closed also, so he closed his again. Opened. Same thing. Then he closed them again.

A powerful link between Patrick and Caleb was established. There was an intense heat radiating from them that Cole could already feel. Both of them opened their eyes at the same time. They held their hands together. Patrick placed his right hand on the center of Cole’s chest. Caleb placed three fingers on Cole’s forehead. Immediately, a warmth spread throughout Cole’s body. He was no longer freezing. He was also immobile.

In Cole's mind, he saw a woman lit up in brilliant, golden hues. He also saw a man, a warrior holding a long spear, and he was shining in sparkling colors of red, gold and white. Without even trying, the thought that Patrick had given him was reverberating in his head. "I'll be fine. I'll always be okay. I'll be fine. I'll always be okay..."

The woman spoke to him. "Child. You truly will always be fine. The fears that have been trapped inside your mind, inside your body, are already being released. You will have no cause, no past, nothing left inside of you to attract the violence any longer."

The warrior spoke. "As a gift to you, from my sons, you will resonate with confidence. At this stage, you are not yet a warrior. Realize, however, that all warriors begin with integrity and confidence. You already had integrity. Now, you will have the confidence."

The woman and the man inside of his head both shot fiery sparks of light into him. He was drowning in energy, a feeling he had never encountered. Cole shrieked. It hurt. It was intense. It was blissful. Every cell of his body was ignited by the powers of Gaia and Muruga. He heard the wind build up speed, rushing through his ears. There was a crackle of thunder. Then all was silent.

They spoke in unison to all three of the boys. It seemed like an alien voice, high and low octaves from the god and goddess. "My sons, you did well today. School is life, and life is a schooling. Treat each moment as new, and continue to see how you can be of help to those who call out."

They released their hold on Cole. He sagged to the ground, spitting and hacking, with tears in his eyes. "Wh- what in the HELL just happened?!"

Neither knew how to explain. They were not ready for this. Both were wishing that Aaron was there. Patrick took out his phone and called Christopher. He explained what they did and asked him what they should tell Cole.

There was a very long pause. “Ask him if he’d like to come for dinner. If he says yes, have him call his parents first. Give the parents Starko’s phone number, if they want it. I sound too much like a kid, so it wouldn’t be good for them to speak with me. Also, at this point, it’s better if he stays the night. So, if you guys can think of something to make that happen, then please do so.”

They did as they were told. Cole nodded. He was still crying. Tears were flowing, and his body was shaking, not from cold, but from the release of old patterns, conditionings and old thoughts.

“I didn’t expect this,” Patrick whispered to Caleb.

“Ummm, no. Me neither.”

After he calmed down, Cole called his mother. She questioned him and asked who his friends were. He told her they were from his choir class, and they were going to help him with the music for the concert the next day. She gave the go-ahead for him to stay the night and said she would see him at the concert.

“Well that’s a perfect lie if I’ve ever heard one.” Caleb thrust his fist out, and Cole reluctantly gave him a fist bump.

Twenty minutes later, Starko pulled up and told them all to get in.



VAUGHN EZRA EDWARD is an Author, a Performing Vocalist & Instrumentalist, and a Photographer. He has performed across the country from coast to coast, singing his own Originals. Along with the vocals, he plays fluently, the keyboard, saxophone and hand drums. He has toured through the Caribbean and has played in multiple clubs, universities, venues and fests around the country.

His travels have led him through almost every mountain range in the United States. During his travels, he studied for many years under many authentic, enlightened teachers from India, Tibet, the U.K., Jamaica, the Island of Mauritius and elsewhere. Each of his teachers left their mark and contributed in some way to the stories and basis of Warrior Children, and the gods and goddesses within the series.

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