

*Tick, tick, tick, boom.*

I laugh as I toss the dynamite away at the last possible second. It flies a good forty feet down the quarry and then goes off in Sal's big, meaty face.

"O ho!" he shouts. "I guess you win that round, Junior!"

"Don't I always?" I grin, walking over and clapping him on the back. "You're too big of a chicken to hold onto the thing for much longer than a second."

"It's instinct," he replies. "Back in my day, immortality didn't mean invincibility. Those things could kill."

"Back in your day?" My grin grows even wider. "You mean back when wooly mammoths were still kicking? Before humans could write or communicate in any sort of real language? Back when religion explained what happened after we died?"

"Hey, you keep religion out of this," Sal warns. "It may not mean much anymore, but it still means something."

I scoff, unbelieving of his words.

"If there is life after death, then may God strike me dead!"

Everything shifts. It isn't that anything changes or moves; everything stays the same, but nothing is what it was. Rather, nothing was what it is, for this new Reality is somehow more real than anything that I had ever experienced. Sal is not, er, was never there and neither was the quarry. Instead, reality has faded into Reality.

I'm standing at a white counter in a white waiting-room. The man, um, woman—I can't quite tell which—behind the counter is nose-deep in a book. I wait politely for a few minutes, but it doesn't notice me. Glancing around awkwardly, I discover a small white bell that blends seamlessly into the countertop. I ring it.

"What?" the angel—I finally realize what it is—jumps up, visibly startled at my appearance. "You shouldn't be here. This is the human waiting-room where people wait to have their fate decided."

"Am I not a human?" I ask, incredulous. Of course, I'm a human. What else would I be?

"You are a human," the angel answers, squinting at me. "That isn't the issue. The issue is that you shouldn't be dead. It's been 18,000 years since anyone showed up here. That was before you humans managed to become invincible as well as immortal. Hold on a second, I need to call someone upstairs."

It disappears behind something white, and I can overhear some scattered words.

"Dead human...-unusual-... said what?-smite...-staying?... Of course."

The angel pops back into sight and gives me an apologetic grin.

"You asked to be smite down, you poor man. Luckily for you, God has decided to take pity on you because the circumstances of your death have reaffirmed the populace's belief in him. So, instead of being sent to Hell and getting the full force of the demons' wrath, you are given an alternative."

I smile in anticipation.

"You can choose to take over my job until the next human shows up."

My hopes plummet as I nod reluctantly.

"Did he at least give you any sort of timetable as to when the next one will arrive?"

"He said sometime in the next quarter-million years."