

"It's been so long since I've spoken to a butterfly", I said to myself. I stared up at the single light in the ceiling, in my room, frozen in thought, before jolting back into consciousness. I look around my small room that was carved out of solid rock. It made me feel like a prisoner to the taliban. I sat there, with my back against the edge of my uncomfortable twin sized bed. Thinking about my life, my current situation, my future.

My name is Chris Casper, I'm 19 years old, and I've had the ability to turn into a smoke-like substance, and yes, speak to butterflies, for as long as I can remember. When I was young, and my parents found out, they did everything they could to keep it a closely guarded secret. They tried their best to understand it, teach me how to control it, and by extension, conceal it. They even tried to reach out to other parents going through the same thing. I remember when I was like 12 and I asked my mom if I could meet some of the kids of the parents that they get advice from over the internet. She basically told me no because she didn't know what the outcome would be like. If only she could see what I've been up to for the past month.

At the beginning of this year, a lot of guys the same age as me started to go missing. I was concerned, but you know, not too concerned. I had been attending community college because I was too disinterested in high school to do good enough to get into a university. I wanted to be an archeologist since about middle school, but coming out of high school, my grades weren't good enough for the university I wanted to get into (and not the next best school either). So, it was off to community college for me, so that I could get actual good grades and transfer to said university. During this time I got a part time job so I could save for a car, and help out with the bills (both of which were hard to do seeing as I always buy manga and anime merchandise when I have the chance). So sometime in between making smoothies and writing papers, I noticed the news starting to cover the case of the missing guys all over the country. It

didn't scare me until my mom told me one of the parents from the 'special kids support group' had a son that went missing. That parent also did some more digging and discovered that many of the missing young men that went missing were 'special' in the sense that I am. I tried to only go outside for the brief moments I needed to. School, work, Barnes & Noble (for the occasional manga of course) was my routine for a month. But any routine can be recognized.

It happened so fast. One day, I was waiting for my mom to pick me up after class, and I began to feel tired. Not in a normal sense, tired as in "I'm about to fall asleep for two days" tired. When I woke up, I was by myself, in the back of a limo headed down some rural ass road. I tried banging on the glass to speak to the driver, opening the door, turning into smoke to seep out through a crack, but nothing worked. We eventually entered a cave, where we drove up to an elevator that seemingly only went down. We stopped in front of it and the driver rolled the window connecting us down a smidge, and flung a dog collar through it before quickly rolling the window back up.

"Put it on!"

he said over an intercom the car apparently had. I wasn't in a position to argue, so I did. It had a metal circular pendant on it. *Beep, beep*, a noise came from the pendant as I demeaningly clicked the collar on. As I did that, the doors on both sides flung open, and buff men in suits came and manhandled me out of the limo and onto my feet. Immediately tried to take to the ceiling as smoke, but nothing happened, outside of the collar beeping.

"Of course" I said as they shoved me into the elevator. They slid the gate shut, and the elevator operator (whom I didn't notice until now) didn't hesitate to take is down.

After about two minutes of straight descent, a booming voice came over the intercom saying,

"Welcome, fighter, to the one and only Hell's Gate Arena! I don't have much time to explain, but you have been chosen to participate in our tournament for the entertainment of our super elite sponsors, and for the grand prize of returning home alive! Now without further adieu, our first match of the day will begin! Chris! Versus! Carter!"

"Wait what!?" I said as the elevator came to a very abrupt stop. The gate swung open, revealing a dug out circular area with a large fourway screen hanging in the center. There were also football field lights in evenly spaced out on the walls of the cave. The operator rudely shoved me out and slammed the gate shut behind me. A couple yards across from me there was another guy, seemingly around my age being shoved out of an elevator as well.

"Now! Fight!" the announcer declared. Simultaneously, the screen facing me played footage of my house, with my mother crying, and talking to the police. The officer then looked at the camera and gave it a wink, before turning back to my mother.

"Now boys, give us a good fight, and your families will be okay, okay?"

"You... BASTARDS!" the guy across from me yelled as he charged straight for me

"Wait please, let's tal-" I was interrupted by a meaty fist ramming my cheek. I fell down, tasting blood as I looked up at the guy with a blade slowly protruding out of his wrist.

"I said, hold! On!" I said as I slung both of my hands forward, turning the entirety of my arms into smoke. My solid hands thumped into his chest, but my smokey appendages kept pushing him higher and higher into the air. I retracted my arms by solidifying them, and he plummeted face first onto the floor. Needless to say, he was unconscious.

"Winner! Chris! Casper!" The announcer declared.

I stood there, panting, in disbelief. Even after all the stories I'd read about heroes and tournaments, I never wanted to use my abilities like this.

"Please, step into the winner's elevator located to your left!" A new elevator descended with another operator at its helms. I walked over to the elevator and repeated the the process three times. Get out, fight, take new elevator, get out, fight, take new elevator, get out, fight, take new elevator. I was numb to it by then. My mind was in the process of adjusting to the hell I'd entered when something unexpected happened. The elevator stopped in a small room.

"Congratulations fighter! You've survived the preliminaries! And without a single casualty! Please, enjoy two days of R&R before we begin the quarterfinals! Until we meet again, fighter!"

The elevator operator, on que, shoved me out, and ascended back up. I let out a deep sigh, and before it was over, tears began to roll down my face.

"I want to go home." I said.

And here we are. Two days later, muscles still sore, mind still not fully adjusted, about to be thrown into a deathmatch. The sound of the elevator descending gave me chills. I haven't been the same since I got in this room.

The gate of the elevator swung open behind me and the announcer said, "Chris Casper! The time has come to continue with our glorious tournament, brought to you by our glorious sponsors!"

I began to giggle. I wasn't going insane, but I'd like to believe I was. I let out a deep sigh and made my way to the elevator, the operator, wearing a white porcelain mask with just two black dots where his eyes should be, and a red cloak, pulled the lever, taking us deeper into Hell. *I wonder what my mom is doing?* I thought to myself, as the hum of the descending elevator mocked me. *Regardless, I won't ever see her again unless I play along with these sick bastards and win this thing, or wait for a window of opportunity and get out of here. Either way, I need to be ready for whatever.* I began to laugh with myself again.

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