

#2

*From the haunting mind of author
Angela White...*

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HOP-17



HUMAN ORIGINS PROGRAM



HOP-17
Human Origins Program
Episode Two
A Comic Book Series
By Angela White

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Episode Two

1

“What did the council choose?”

“She’s slated to be dropped on HOP-28.”

“Wow. They only send the worst criminals there.”

“She deserves it. Half of the reproducing families lost a child because of her! Not to mention one of the last professors who could convince some of these kids to keep the program going. The cost is uncountable.”



Amanda struggled to wake fully, aware of the voices and the feel of steel against her naked skin. She'd had to use the sleep gun when the door to her room had slid open. That fury had held no mercy.

“There's talk of restarting the death penalty to deal with these rebels.”

“Sending them to HOP-28 is a death sentence.”

Amanda listened to the guards talk. She wondered briefly if they knew she was alert inside this chamber, but then the silvery liquid began flowing in, chasing out all other thoughts.

The teenager tensed, but only mentally. All of her muscles were paralyzed. She tried to stay calm as that precious, terrifying liquid closed over her face, but it was impossible not to scream silently as she was drowned in the chemicals that would preserve her for the drop.

Time slowed, but Amanda didn't go to sleep or pass out. The process was meant to allow awareness of what was going on, but she wished for unconsciousness. Having no control over her body, her life, was a horror that went on for an eternity as her chamber was loaded onto a small transport ship that already held a number of

other rebels who had been sentenced to the same fate. The trials hadn't taken long. Amanda had only been on the home station for three days before the verdict came and she was shipped right back out. The citizens of Eden didn't care for criminals being near them for any longer than was necessary.

The drop was rough.

Amanda silently screamed herself into a migraine as the pod shot toward the flipping blue and green planet



below. She continued to yell in her mind as her thin ship breached the atmosphere and flamed up, barreling toward the ground.

As the surface neared, the parachute finally emerged to snap the pod into a higher orbit that let it float

gently to the ground. As it came to a stop and the controls lit up in activation, Amanda kept right on screaming. The silvery liquid was draining, running from her mouth and nose like blood as it brought her body to life with pain and misery.

Amanda choked as air was forced into her lungs, arms coming up to rip away the tubes so the vomit had somewhere to go. She felt it land on her naked skin, but didn't care. The need to breathe came first.

The pod stayed closed while Amanda got herself together. She was grateful for the clean clothes and kit of basic supplies that she wasn't supposed to have, but terror wouldn't leave her heart. She was on the worst of the HOP worlds. Alone.



Hop-28 had been designated just for criminals. Amanda didn't know if it was another experiment that had gone bad, but it seemed likely. She searched the kit and pod for a weapon. The convict was forced to

accept the fact that she wouldn't have one until she could make it.

Amanda watched the sun sink with a shiver. The pod only held enough power to last until morning. After that, the lid would open and remain that way. Pods couldn't be closed once the power was gone. They also couldn't be opened without power, and Amanda made sure to stay awake until dawn so that she wouldn't be trapped inside. Early drops had often failed because the people tried to hide inside and died from suffocation. Many of the rebels had cited such failures of the program during their trials. They sometimes shouted at the shocked Council and acted so rabid that they had to be sedated. Amanda had chosen to speak a single sentence.

"I set them free of your chains. Their souls will thank me."

The verdict had been unanimous. Amanda Roth, daughter of the now disgraced President, would spend the rest of her years on HOP-28. She was given no special consideration or advantages that might help her survival odds against those already on that ugly planet. Being so high in the chain of command had hurt her. That was the rumor, but Amanda had known exactly



what she was doing when she and her parents had agreed to this. Her mother and father were trying to fade from public view now, so that when the rebels finally breached Eden, they wouldn't be blamed or hurt. Everyone else on that giant, life-sucking station would be removed. The only part missing would be the asteroid.



Dawn on HOP-28 was stunning. If not for needing to time her exit while watching the unfriendlies who were waiting, she would have lingered to enjoy it. She'd only witnessed a few sunrises from a planet. It was mesmerizing under the right circumstances.

"That isn't now, Mandi. Get it together," Amanda ordered, gathering her courage. Some of the criminals on this planet had been here for

decades. They had their own rules, structure, a hierarchy, and none of it would include listening to the rantings of a newly convicted teenager. Amanda expected no civilities. If she wanted to be heard, she would have to prove herself by surviving this phase of the drop.

Amanda wiped the condensation from a side window, trying to determine which way to go as the lid lifted. She wasn't encouraged to see legs and feet encased in dark fur. People were already waiting for the pods to open. The drops were often gauntlets, but at least she'd been put down with a lot of other...



"Damn!" Amanda slammed her fist into the window, drawing attention, but it didn't matter. There wasn't another pod in sight. When the lid lifted, the group of criminals would be on her. Running wouldn't work.

Is there anything I can say to them? she wondered in

jerky panic as the timer on the window began flashing.
No.

The ten seconds went by in a blur.

The lid rose slowly, but Amanda didn't wait. She dove out as soon as there was room, rolling toward the small hill she'd discerned through the window.

"There she goes!"

"A runner! Cool!"

"Get on that!"

"Yes, sir!"

The criminals gave chase as Amanda leapt to her bare feet awkwardly in the mud and took off as fast as she could go. It looked like there was a cliff at the end of the small hill. She was an excellent swimmer. If she could just get...

Amanda skidded to a halt

as she hit the top of the hill, dropping into shock and terror as the town of people below spotted her.

They rushed forward, sandwiching her between both groups.

Hoping it would help, she dropped to her knees and put her hands over her head. Fifty was too many to fight.



Amanda didn't resist as she was shoved forward. Her arms were jerked behind her back and laced together with something that felt like a vine. Amanda studied the feet surrounding her, but didn't make eye contact with anyone yet. Her mind was racing through possible actions and reactions.

"Is it her?"

"Where's her tag?"

Amanda was rolled over without the roughness she was expecting. Hands quickly patted her down while she stared at the trees above them. She wasn't ready to meet her captors yet. She'd really been hoping to be dropped on a planet that was



uninhabited for a while, but even this wasn't too much for her to handle. She'd known she would have to build a peace before she could enjoy it.

"It's her. Let's go."

Amanda was pulled onto her feet, where she was forced to look at those she would have to share this planet with. Expecting primitive living, it was something of a shock to find a quietly watching crowd of clean men and women around them. Those in charge, a group of five it seemed like, flashed friendly glances and gave her nods of respect that were confusing.



"Welcome to HOP-28," one of the women from the small group stated as she stopped in front of Amanda. She had shoulder length blonde hair and a hard profile that sported intense blue eyes. "Hope you've had your shots."

Surprised, Amanda only nodded, taking in their clothes and tools. She'd thought spears and knives would be used, but they had laser guns! Their leggings and tops were made of the same material as her own. How was that possible?

"I'm Reila."

The long pause after the introduction forced the captive to respond. "Amanda Roth. Pleased to meet you."

"Yes." Reila studied the teenager openly, not impressed so far. "You'll be in the contaminated zone for a few days. Don't fight them and it'll go faster."

Reila waited for questions or demands—she'd been told to expect both—but Amanda only stared back impassively.

"Let's go," Reila directed, motioning to the people behind Amanda.

Amanda was pushed from behind and she went without verbally protesting, though she did toss a warning glance over her shoulder.

Jerald, not used to dealing with her kind, stared in confusion. She wasn't the presidential daughter they'd planned on—he knew that already. Some of the worst criminals in the universe were sent here to emerge from their pods screaming or crying. This one had planned an escape. If not for her pod being redirected to a different location, she might have vanished in the first rush.

Amanda was aware of the man staring at her. She didn't like him. "What's wrong with you?"

Jerald gaped in surprise. "What?"

Amanda glanced at Reila. "You vetted him, right? Personally?"

Reila didn't pause in her steps. "I gave birth to him. Does that count?"



Amanda didn't say more, but she did wonder if the mother was as bad as the son. She wasn't sure why she thought he was a true killer, but the impression wasn't fading.

Jerald scowled, shoving her again. "Eyes front!"

Amanda was sure that she shouldn't permit any abuse, but the man and his long, dark hair had also already earned her ire. She slowed a bit, waiting to feel the gun butt moving toward her spine again... Amanda whirled around and snatched it from his careless grip. One quick turn had it pointed at his chest.



"How did you get free?!"

"My father taught me to escape any bonds." Amanda slowly lowered the weapon, aware of the other criminals now rushing back toward them. "He also taught me to skin a carcass. Bet it isn't that hard on a person. Wanna volunteer to try it with me?"

A bit shaken, Jerald snatched his gun back. "No."

Amanda turned toward his mother, voice like the ice she'd been encased in. "Touch me again and you won't have to volunteer."

Ahead of them, Reila chuckled. "Maybe first impressions aren't accurate here."

Amanda shrugged. "Maybe some respect is deserved."

"Oh, I do respect you, my murderous little guest. But I respect your family even more. That's why you've been brought here instead of being hunted down for sport like the other drops."

Amanda knew to heed that warning, but she was distracted from their sparring as the small town came into view again. Built in the old style she'd only read

about, Amanda thought they were called cabins. There were dozens of them, some on top of others to create a wooden city that even held towers and a gate made of hundreds of upright logs lashed together. It was so civilized that Amanda laughed.



“What’s wrong with *you*?” Jerald demanded from her side. He didn’t like walking behind her for some reason. Amanda just kept walking, not wanting to try to explain her mixed up thoughts right now. She’d anticipated having to make her own shelter and hunt her own food before she could start her next plans. This was going to be too easy.

“Look out!” Jerald shouted, shoving toward his mother to protect her. “Ambush!”

“Protect the girl!” Reila ordered, but it was too late.



An instant later a long spear went into Amanda’s chest with an awful thump that made her feel like a balloon that had been popped. She held onto life, awareness, for a second longer, and then blood gushed over her lips in crimson agony as

her soul disconnected. She didn’t feel it as her body slumped to its knees, propped up only by the spear.

"I'm dead!"

There was only light around her. It was terrifying.

"Yes."

Amanda tried to spin and failed. "Who is that?"

"I am He."

On the edge of panicking, she asked, "He, who?"

"He who, indeed."

Amanda tried to concentrate, but she had no sight, no sense of touch, and no sound. It was disorienting and scary.

"You have passed over."

That powerful voice was in her mind. *No, it has to be in my soul*, she thought. *I died. No mind anymore. Or maybe...now I'm all mind? Either way, I felt it happen. I'm dead.*

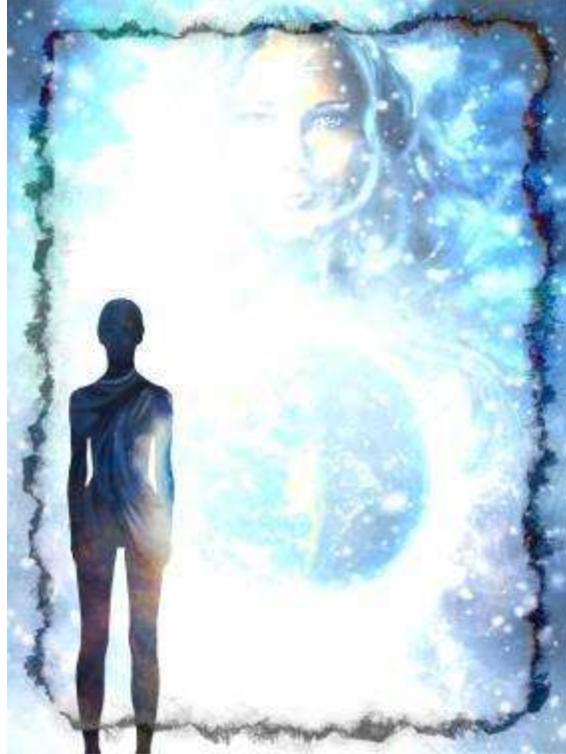
"Yes."

"Why did I have to die?"

"Why does everyone have to know that answer?" the mysterious voice complained. "No one ever asks if I've had a good rest cycle or if I'm happy to see them. It's always, *Why did I die? Can't I go back? I have so much to do still!* Blah. Blah. Blah."

Amanda winced at the bitterness, starting to realize what was happening. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to die, you know."

"No one ever plans on it. Even those who take their own lives want it back at the last second, when it is far too late. Liars abound in all levels of life and death."



"Even this one?"

There was a thoughtful chuckle. "No. I am pure. I do not cover myself in the rags of the wretched."

"Why do you talk like that?"



Another soft chuckle came. "I forgot that you are so tender. Older souls often cannot speak at a moment like this, but a rebellious, willful child can be counted on to open their mouth and let their tongues roll right out."

Amanda wisely mashed her lips together. *Wait. I don't have lips. Just be still, don't think about anything. ...but I died! I did have so much to do still! I was born and raised for the sole purpose of bringing down the Federation. My entire life was spent in training to carry out this plan. I can't die after only one minute!*

"The odds are often stacked against those who seek to accomplish great things," the voice comforted.

Amanda tried to roll her eyes and settled for mentally growling at herself for forgetting. "Is this normal? I feel like I'm going crazy."

"No. You were pulled from absorption, which has no awareness. You have a further value."

Amanda felt her soul begin to cry as she accepted that her death was now a reality. Her clock had stopped.



"The mourning period. It's right on time," the voice praised. "I've been waiting for someone like you to cross over."

Amanda tried to pull out of her misery. "For what? An example?" She hadn't forgotten that she was a mass murderer.

"In a way. I have a duty for you to perform. If you do it well, there may be forgiveness at the end, if you are humble and repentant."

Amanda thought of that definition and slowly shook her



non-existent head.

"What if I say no?"

"YOU WILL NOT!"

Amanda cowered mentally, more terrified than she'd even been.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!"

The Being calmed, returning to the first, comforting tone. "I will answer your questions

and you will fulfill your duty to the Creator, who gifted you with life. These debts must be paid."

Amanda tried to nod, sobbing from the unfairness of it all. "I will."

"Good. Once the self-recriminations begin, we will take a break and let your fragile mind rest. Do not fear the darkness, for it is mine and I have dominion over all things here."

Amanda wasn't comforted, but she was too busy exploring those new words to worry over the future. Right now, there was only this second of looking back on her choices to see if she had a reason to lament them.

Amanda slowly dried her mental tears and tried to face her Maker. "I would do it all over again. I'm *not* sorry."

A harsher chuckle came this time. "That is partly why I chose you. Murderer. Killer of my children. Liar. Blasphemer. Infiltrator. Betrayer."

Amanda wilted before the titles as if she were being struck.

"You will wear all of those chains until you repent of the sins against me," the Creator warned. "Take your leave of me now, for I am wearied by the very feel of your stained soul."

Amanda felt the darkness closing in on her mind and fought to get out a quick question that had occurred. "What was the rest of the reason that I was chosen?"



The Creator sighed heavily, revealing a hatred and bitterness that eclipsed her own by miles. "Because you were born and raised for the sole purpose of bringing down the Federation. Your entire life was spent in training to carry out that plan. You cannot die after only one minute."

Amanda wanted to ask more, to swear she would do anything for another chance at that goal, but the darkness swallowed her whole and there was only the great, black nothingness.

3

"You will wake now, *murderer*."



Amanda snapped into alertness so fast that she cried out from the new sensation. The nothingness had been comforting after a while.

"A sleep cycle allows no negative thoughts," the Creator stated.

Amanda thought he sounded more tense than when they'd first spoken. "Are you okay?"

There was a long pause where Amanda waited nervously. She was supposed to show caring, right?

"That depends. Do you care if I'm okay or do you care if it scores points to ask me such?"

"Both," Amanda answered. While in the sleep cycle, she'd dreamed of being young and unaware of the future waiting for her. It had been nice. She felt like she could almost handle things now.

"Honesty is good. Your duty must begin today. The asteroid has been sent."

Amanda tried to stare in shock and managed to annoy herself again. It was hard getting used to not having a physical presence.



"You're doing remarkably well, if that can be a consolation."

"It is," she answered gratefully. "A little. Wait. An asteroid removal program takes a long time, even once scheduled. How long have I been gone?"

"A year in your time."

Amanda struggled not to lose that good vibe she'd just had. "Oh. Well. I uh... Is the AR for HOP-17?"

"It is for me."

"Here? I mean, the planet where I died?"

"Yes."

"You said 'me'. Are you..." Amanda stopped, not sure how to phrase the question in a way that wouldn't be offensive. "Alive?"

"Are you?"



She scowled, rolled her eyes, and felt the rest of the good vibes float away with her missing body. "Funny."

"Death is the illusion, child. Life is in all things. Death is a doorway to other realms."

"I don't understand."

"You will," the Creator promised.

Amanda immediately felt concern. "What do you want from me?"

There was a long pause as Amanda mentally closed her eyes and tried to enjoy not having to hit the little girl's space room every couple of hours. She did miss eating, though.

"Listen, and take this knowledge deep, murderer. You will be the first to ever hear it."

Amanda tried to brace for something bad. Now that she was dead and the mysteries of the galaxy were at her fingertips, the teenager was scared.

"You are right to be so, but also wrong. Calm yourself now, for I have a story to tell you."

Amanda smiled at the wording, as the Creator had known she would.

"My mother used to tell me bedtime tales. I liked that."

"Your mother was a snake in the garden, child, but that matters not. Listen, for our time is shorter now."

Scolded, Amanda fell silent, but she couldn't stop wondering if that was figurative or literal. She had no idea how soul distribution worked. Her mother could have been a snake in a previous life. The power Amanda could feel from this being seemed endless.

"When I seeded myself through the universes, I did not realize your primitive brains would prevent communication. I assumed that I would be able to guide my creations. When I discovered otherwise, I was reluctant to destroy them. I had hoped they would find the light within by the time they were reunited with me, but that has not been the case."

"You want me to tell them?" Amanda guessed. "Because the minute they see me, I'll be right back here with you. Great idea."



"That body no longer exists, child. Soothe yourself and listen, so that you may have true understanding of what is expected of you."

Amanda felt the second scold as if she had been sharply slapped and knocked to her knees. *He got tired of the kind,*

loving image, she thought.

"I am neither kind, nor loving. Those are man's creations. I am eternal, relentless, and I exist in all things. Over the millennia, I have built bridges and come to my creations individually. It took great energy from me to assume a human form, energy that I have not been able to replace, and the next stage of my own existence soon approaches. Before I am reseeded unto a thousand stars, I would know that my offspring are safe from *your* kind. I want the people of Eden and all other space-dwellers to return to the land from whence they were crafted. You will get them to come home."

"Let me get this straight," Amanda began, forgetting her place once again. "You care about the *planets* you'll reseed, but not the people you created to live on them?"

"You will not question!"

Despite her terror, Amanda laughed.

She knew it was a bad idea, but she couldn't help the peals of harsh chuckles, nor the ensuing rant.

The Creator allowed it. He needed something from this soul that he hadn't from all the others, but more than that, compassion for the tiny beings he'd created did exist. It was simply outweighed by his disappointment at what they'd become.



"Your kind are the destroyers," the Creator stated as Amanda prepared for punishment. "Mine are the hosts. Yours are the parasites. One cannot exist without the other, for I have made it so."

"Can you unmake it?"

"I... I don't understand."

Amanda could tell that rarely, if ever, happened, and she tried to be respectful as she answered, "Can you change your designs?"

"Why would I do that? The design is perfect."

"So you could?" she insisted evenly.

"Yes. It would take much time, however, and energy that I must put into my reseedling."

"Why did you pick me?" Amanda asked abruptly. "Is it because I'm ruined already and will make any deal you want?"

"Yes. And more. Within you lies the potential of all humanity to reach a level of advancement that your scientists can never measure. Because you hate all sides equally, your compassion is pure. It is the only brightness in your soul."

"I wasn't raised to be happy and gentle," Amanda sullenly reminded him.

"Yes. You are a product of your environment, but so many have been. The difference is your soul still shines, even with all that darkness. I believe you are capable of great change."

"We came from the dirt..."

"Yes."

Amanda drew in a breath, caught herself. No body!

"Where did *you* come from?"

"Why must I be different than you?"

"Because you are," Amanda supplied logically. "You're a...planet God?"

"I am the first."

"But who made you?"

"I am the first."

"I don't understand. How can you come from nothing?"

"The nothing has never existed. I have always been. Over time again, I have become more."

"But everything has to have a beginning, a start, a maker."

"Everything, since me. Every speck came from me."

"And you've always existed?"

"Yes. It is the perception that there was nothing first, that is false. I am eternal, through the past and future."

"So what were humans?"

"A way to seed myself. I became lonely."

"We're seeds?"

"Yes. All forms of life are seeds of the planet that created them."

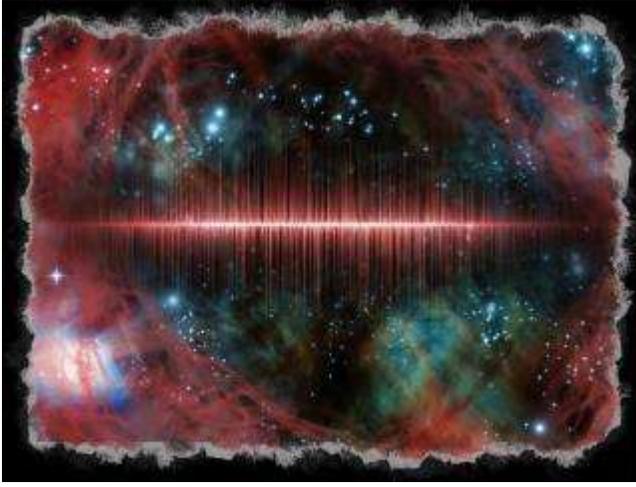
"And the grand plan that we've all tried to prove or disprove?"



"No."

"No?"

"No."



"So you got lonely, seeded humans, and now that you have enough other planet Gods to keep you company, you don't care enough about the humans to save them."

"I care enough to let you, one of their own,

decide their fate. Is that not merciful enough?"

Amanda barely stopped a nasty reply, though she was sure the Creator knew what she was thinking. She pushed into this new prison, needing to know the rest of the story. "How did you seed yourself?"

"I erupted until the building blocks of life could not avoid each other. I made the trees to sustain the birds, to sustain the land creatures, to sustain the water creatures, and so on. It was a magnificent expression of myself."

"But?" Amanda asked, sure there was one. Otherwise, human life wouldn't have gotten so messed up.

"Over time, I realized that I had given everything a mate, a way to live forever, except for myself. So I sought to create another *me*."

"You seeded space with other planets? How?"



"I exploded," the Creator answered simply. "Now, I am in everything. The same happens to each of us. We gather energy to explode, thus seeding ourselves through time infinitely. Most of your deaths are the planet energy being reabsorbed for other uses, but now, for the first time, *seeds* are destroying their hosts."

"Why don't you stop them? Send the flood again or something?"

The Creator chuckled, but not patiently this time. "They are *all* my creations. None of them deserve my wrath for that fact alone."

"So you let them get by with it because of pride?"

Amanda was slapped this time. Her nonexistent head banged into a nonexistent floor. She lay there, stunned.



"I am a Creator!"

Amanda, stinging from the invisible punishment, glared upward as best she could manage. "Hit me again and I won't ever do what you want. You'll lose yourself and your companions."

Amanda felt the Being's shock at her threat, but her death and then the calm period afterward had given her time (*A year! I've been gone a year!*) to consider her options. As a mass murderer, she expected no mercy. Therefore, she had nothing to lose.

Amanda slowly stood, inasmuch as she could do that. Adjusting to this new form without a body was hard. "Tell me about the seeding. If there are so many, why haven't we had contact with other species or planet Gods?"

Amanda knew her existence was being decided, but it didn't matter to her now. She was dead. She could still be hurt, but that was all life had been anyway. She would adapt.

"That remarkably unbreakable spirit isn't natural, murderer. I did not give you that."

Amanda understood the insult, and shrugged. "If it had come from you, if we had known the truth from the fantasies, maybe you wouldn't regret your human creations."



"I cannot," the Creator shot back grumpily. "They are my physical presence, my awareness made visible, touchable. I adore my creations. I will not destroy them."

"So you want me to do it since I'm already damned."

"Yes."

Amanda didn't see where she had another choice, but instead of agreeing blindly, she tried to cover herself for later. "Will I be forgiven?"

"We will not discuss those things until the duty is finished."

"Are there any rules I need to follow, or maybe, I don't know, skills you can give me to make this possible?"

The Creator chuckled. "The ability to defeat death is no skill, murderer."

"Don't call me that."

"Why do you balk at the title? It is earned."

"Ability to defeat death," Amanda pushed. "You mean they won't be able to kill me?"

"Death is unstoppable. Each time, you can be risen, through me."

"How many times?"

"I am endless. Unless you let them destroy me. The other beings will not resurrect you if you fail to save me. Their will is clear on this."

"Do you have a council?"

"Of sorts, but not in the way you mean. I may explain more of these curiosities to you in time, if you do well in your tasks."

"And those are?"

"First, you must take over the rebel plans and implement the destruction of Eden. That will save years of your time to destroy the Federation completely."

Realizing she would get to accomplish her life goals made Amanda reckless. "Then I agree."

Lightning seemed to flash, sealing the deal.

"Sleep now, for when you wake again, a second chance will have begun."

Amanda realized too late that she should have asked more questions. It was her last thought as the nothingness smothered her in comfort.

4



Amanda snapped awake with a deep gasp, drawing air into lungs that hadn't ever been used. Her perfect body, full of strength and life, vibrated in unhappy convulsions as she coughed.

"Where did she come from?"

"We must have missed one."

"Grab her and let's go."

Amanda was hauled to her feet, hands roaming her legs.

"I found her marker. Name is..."

Jerald fell silent, looking into the teenager's cold eyes.

"Well?" Reila asked.

"You're not gonna believe this." Jerald was staring at the girl's face, trying to figure out what the joke was.

Amanda held still as Reila read her marker.

"Amanda Roth, daughter of the former President of Eden."

"She was killed right here, in this very spot, over a year ago!" Jerald protested angrily.

Resisting the urge to explore her new body, Amanda met Reila's eyes without smiling. "Who threw the spear that killed me? I demand justice."

Reila paled. As far as they knew, only the people on this planet were aware of what had happened.

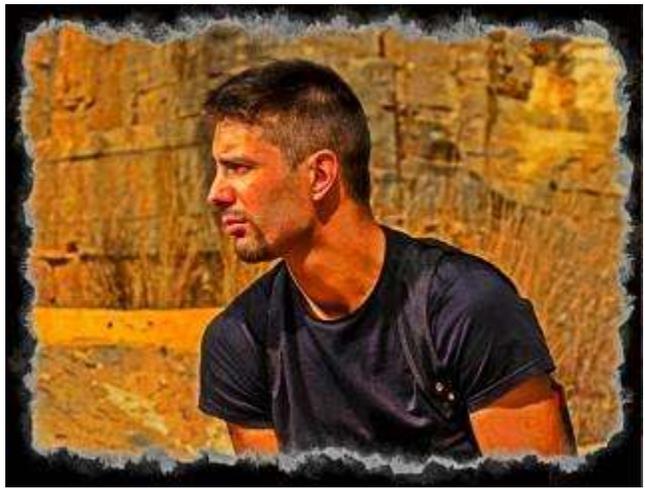
The Federation had been monitoring the drop and probably knew Amanda had been killed, but they wouldn't have known how.

"How do you know that?" Jerald demanded.

Amanda kicked his frozen hand from her ankle tattoo. "I've been sent back to guide the rebels to victory over the Federation. The *Creator* wants them all gone."

The criminals stared at her as if she had just sprouted wings.

Amanda smirked, moving toward the little town nearby. She remembered the fort-like setup clearly. "Take me to your council table. I need a drink, and we have things to discuss."



"That's a lie!"
"What the hell?"
"Who is she, really?!"
"Tell the truth! Who are you?"

Amanda wasn't sure how much of the truth she should tell, but it occurred to her that they weren't going to



believe it, no matter what she said. She doubted this planet had DNA technology, despite their obvious supply sources, but Amanda also wasn't sure that test would come back as her, since she had a new body now.

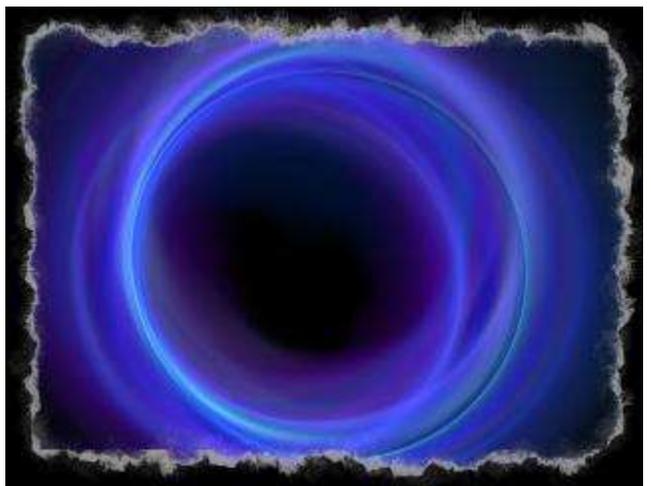
Thank you for that, she sent silently, wishing she'd asked for a way to communicate with the Creator once she came back.

Reila took a seat at the head of the table. Jerald stayed near Amanda, his face a mass of angry confusion.

Amanda listened to the shouts and denials, now trying to figure out if any of the men and women here were guilty of her murder. That would be settled while she was alive.

"Quiet!" Reila shouted, still studying her captive. She didn't believe the girl...and yet, she did. The Roth magnetism was memorable, to say the least.

The crowd of roughly one hundred quieted, taking seats or leaning against the four wooden walls. Reila waited for full silence to come, glad of it. She had to



think. Their enemies were clever. She was already convinced that this was a trap of some sort.

"Her marker says Amanda Roth. We all know that killer died here. We saw it." Reila glowered at Amanda, turning her full scorn on the stiffly standing girl who knew things that she shouldn't. "Explain yourself and do it right now. If we don't believe you, you'll be executed. *Today.*"

Amanda was terrified of what she was about to do. There was a chance that she'd been tricked, or that the Creator would be angry, but her morbid curiosity had to be satisfied. It would prove it to them, and to herself.



"Shoot me."

Everyone stared in disbelieving surprise.

Amanda smiled shakily. "I've been told that I can't be killed, that I'll rise every time. Let's test it together."

"You're nuts!" Jerald blared, gun lowering. "We don't shoot unarmed kids who don't pose a threat."

Suddenly eager to find out if she really did have immunity against death, Amanda ran toward

Jerald, outstretched hands going for his throat like a child.

The man defended himself, but only against a teenage female. Because of his mercy, Amanda was able to twist free of his light hold and grab the unprotected knife from his belt. She moved lightning fast, squeezing into his space like a lover as she went for his throat again.

Not used to fighting women, Jerald was caught off guard and didn't react in time to escape the other arm

wrapping around his head to keep him captive against the blade. The tip sank into his neck.

Jerald froze, feeling the girl's threat clearly now.

"I will kill him," Amanda warned coldly as they were surrounded by Reila and guards. Behind them, the others blocked doors and windows in case the teen tried to run.

"Shoot me," Amanda repeated, looking at Reila. "Do it right now, or I'll kill your son."

Furious at how this had gotten out of control so fast, Reila stormed over and blew the stupid kid's brains out.

Amanda didn't feel her body fall, nor the scramble that Jerald made to get away from the gore. She



was jerked back into the nothingness.

Except, this time, there was a presence waiting for her.

Amanda tried to adjust to being dead again, but she was more disoriented than she'd been before. "Hello?"

A warm sigh of tolerant annoyance swept over her in concern.

"Ten minutes. That's all you could manage."

Amanda laughed, glad there was no horrible rage greeting her. "New record, right?"

"Humans should not wonder why a creator avoids them when life means so little." The Creator sighed again. "Go back, killer. Go back with your words proven."

Amanda's eyes opened.

Under the dizziness and blood, Amanda heard screams and footsteps of people getting away from her.

"Excellent. Thank you!" Amanda sat up, running a hand across her temple to verify that the bullet hole was gone. She was covered in blood and gore, though. It was gross.

"Anyone got another shirt I can borrow? This one seems to have gotten a bit of my brain on it."

A few feet away, Reila fainted. Jerald was too stunned to notice.

Amanda grinned. "The Creator wants me in charge of the plans to bring down the Federation. Anyone feel like arguing?"



The End of Episode Two

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Thank you! Have a wonderful week!

Waving,

Angela White

Episode Three

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