

## **SMTGEN SUBMISSION:**

### **I Am Herald**

The Lord rules me. I have served Him among His Powers since the day he commanded Michael to thrust Lucifer from His inner sanctum, when he fell to Earth as a shooting star. I have been commanded by Michael from then until now, driving off demons from crossing the great divide to the gates of Heaven. Moments ago, however, upon returning from the front, I received a calling from the Archangel Mastema, with orders to descend upon the Earth as a Herald. The news came to me as quite a shock, given that I have never once interacted with man, but His duty is my duty. I quickly left from my post, and met The Saint Of The Gates, who sent me down to the realm of man.

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I find myself in the dark of the night, between two great stone walls which stretch out in both directions. On one side, there is more dark, but on the other, there are glimmers of passing lights. As I begin to approach them, I see a man on the ground beside me, leaning up against a metal box full of filth, the stench of which fills me with disgust.

“You there!”, I exclaim. “I am Herald. Where is this place?”

The man looks up at me, and I notice that he appears to be in pain. “We’re in an alley, Harold.”

I kneel down to inspect the man better. He is clearly either injured or not in his right mind. “Are you alright? Do you need help?”

“I’ll be fine. Just a touch of the consequences.”, he says, holding up a glass bottle. “You could carry me home, though.”

After he says that, I get off my knees and pick him up in my arms. He does not struggle, though if that is due to trust or incapability I do not know. As I walk with him into the light, I see more

constructions of stone and metal that touch the sky. Never having seen the feats of humanity before, I am in awe. The man quickly snaps me back to the task at hand, though, when he mumbles how to reach his home. On the way there, I pass a few other men who give me odd stares. I figure they must not comprehend the Lord's chosen as easily as the one in my arms does. Arriving at his home, he hands me a key to unlock the door, and we ascend a flight of stairs which seem to be nearing collapse. Then, I unlock one more door to enter his chambers. As I lay him down on his bed, he appears to fall asleep, and I use the opportunity to look around his quarters. The place is composed of one large room with a bed and various cooking equipment, and another smaller room decorated in white porcelain, which I assume is used for either worship or great thought.

As I'm busy admiring his veneration chamber though, he goes into a coughing fit. I quickly rush in to assist him, but he stops as soon as he sees me.

"You're still here?", he asks as he begins to lean himself up.

"Of course I am.", I state. "You aren't well. It would be a sin to leave you to die. What is your name?"

"It's Bernie.", he says as he gets up from his bed and heads to a cabinet. "Listen. Do you really need to stick around, Harold? I know I forgot to take my pills, but I've got work tomorrow, and you're gonna make it real difficult."

"I refuse to leave you until you are well.", I respond. As I continue to look over him, my mind begins to wonder. "What is your work?"

"I, uh, teach elementary kids.", he says.

"Ah!", I exclaim. "Truly a virtuous man! You must be well-respected by your peers!"

He does not respond to my statement, likely out of modesty, while pouring himself a drink from the very same bottle he had been holding in the alley. The liquid is the color of amber, and he must be keen on moderation as well, since he only fills the glass up a quarter of the way. As Bernie notices me staring, he gestures the cup towards me, offering it. I am delighted to oblige, and quickly accept by taking it from his hands and drinking with gratefulness.

As it goes down my throat, I feel a burning sensation, but also some kind of cleansing. I enjoy it, and so I request Bernie for two more. He appears to be in disbelief at my request, and for a moment I fear I have overstepped on his generosity, but he simply hands me the entire bottle. “You are a saint!”, I say to him. “I came to help you, and yet you give me the cloak off your back!”

Bernie begins to laugh, sharing in my joy as I gleefully finish the rest of the bottle. Not a moment after quaffing it however, I begin to feel even better. My body feels light, as if my wings could lift me off the ground without so much as a flap, and my head feels the rush I only have felt while driving a spear through a demon.

“You look like you’re enjoying yourself, Harold,” Bernie says to me with a smile.

“Indeed I am.”, I respond. “In your kindness you have shown me how sweet the fruits of man can be. Tell me, what is this that you have shared with me?”, I ask as I hand Bernie the empty bottle.

“Jack Daniels,” he says. “It’s whiskey.”

“This was named after another man?”, I say, astounded. “He must have had great virtue.”

“He sure did.”, Bernie says before walking into his porcelain chamber. He spends a few minutes inside thinking, before I hear the sound of rushing water as he leaves.

“Hey Harold.”, he says. “Follow me.”

I do, and though I find it hard to stand, let alone walk, I follow him out his window, to a red metal railing out in the night. We sit on the steel, perched above an alley and looking at another building across it.

Bernie retrieves a small package from his clothes, and takes a white stick out of it which he ignites and holds up to his mouth. He hands me one as well, and lights it for me. I breathe in the ether, and yet another rush goes to my head, even stronger than the last. However, it quickly fades, and so I take another breath. I continue this cycle, and before I know it, the stick is gone, while Bernie is only halfway through his.

Once he finishes, he says he's going to bed for the night, before leaving me a case, filled with boxes of the white sticks.

"It was nice knowing you Harold, but I've got a feeling I'm not gonna see you tomorrow. Enjoy yourself."

"And you as well Bernie", I say. "I will remember you, and what you have taught me of the fruits of man."

As he retreats back into his quarters, I ignite another stick. Through the night, I look up at the sky's blinking lights, like shooting stars, and work my way through the box which Bernie gifted me. As I get to my hundredth stick, I feel that I finally understand just how great the fruit which men bear is. I hope that when I one day return to Mastema, he will be pleased with what I have found.