

Exclusive Sneak Peek
of
Book Two in the Award-Winning *Life After* Series



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Life After Series: Book Two

The Trials

My heart beat frantically as if trying to gain speed and explode from my chest. I held my sword up in the defensive position as I checked my surroundings, breathing shallowly to stay quiet. In the off chance my enemy didn't already know my position, I didn't want to give it up. My eyesight was slightly obscured from the sweat dripping unfettered down my face. I couldn't chance the movement to wipe it away. Fear scrambled for a foothold I refused to give. My arms shook with the strain of the sword's weight. Having finally built up the extra muscle to wield it fluidly, the exertion and adrenaline from hours of fighting, chasing, and being chased was showing.

"Don't lock up your muscles, even if you're so tired you think there's no other way to stay standing. Stay fluid and light on your feet. Always."

My mentor's voice echoed in my head as clearly as if he was standing right next to me. It was a lesson he reminded me of often. I tried to do exactly what he'd instructed, but I was getting to the point where perhaps locked muscles *was* the only way to remain on my feet.

The sound of flesh sliding across smooth surface caught my ears. I cocked a head and strained to hear more. It became so silent I questioned what I thought I heard. It was a sound I'd heard often enough that day that maybe I had made it up.

Three sharp clicking noises was the only other warning I received before the dark creature sprang at me, talons, jaws, spikes and anything else sharp extended towards me as it flew through the air. Without even a moment to think I threw my

softer body right in its direction. I ducked into a roll at the last moment while it's razor edges sailed over my head towards the spot I'd just been standing.

This one was smaller than most of the others, but what it lacked in girth, it made up in, well . . . pointy sharp things all over its body. This was a beast I wanted to make sure stayed out of my personal space. Someone had gotten creative with this fellow. I seriously wanted to punch whoever that was right now, but was too busy dodging its relentless attacks.

It came at me with claws, then followed with a whip of its tail or a snap of its jaws. The assaults where in such quick succession our movements blurred. I was like a Jedi knight allowing the force to lead my deflections. With sweat still free flowing into my eyes it was the wind from its movements and not my eyesight that alerted me to each consecutive attack.

It herded me to a dead end with shipping crates on each side and at my back. This was it, I had to defeat this thing or all would be for naught. Since my sword wasn't on fire the appendages that were coming in contact with it were barely scratched rather than charred clean off like they'd normally be. Only an offensive attack that would bring my foe down. I put extra force into the next defensive block, which was just barely enough to throw the creature's equilibrium off for a millisecond, but that was what I needed to turn and take a few sprinting steps towards the container and then two steps up its side before flipping backwards. With a battle cry I aimed my sword down with the intention of impaling it in the creature's spinal cord. Surely slowing it down if not killing it completely. As if time itself slowed I saw my aim was true and would hit its mark. There was a single

solitary moment of perceived victory before I was jerked to a sudden and painful stop, and the world went white.

I looked around in confusion.

“What?” I yelled into the seeming nothingness, still suspended awkwardly in the air. “That was perfect.”

I dropped to the ground as abruptly as I’d been stopped mid-air. What appeared to be a huge screen materialized in front of me to play back the last few moments, only this time I was looking at the scene rather than an active part of it. It showed a slowed down version of the past and I watched myself deflect the creature, it’s balance shaken as I whirled around, reached the shipping crate, then in a perfectly maneuvered move used a couple of large steps as leverage to push and propel myself air-borne and back towards the demon. I was right, my blade had been in perfect position, but it was the tail and it’s 2 foot jagged spike that was less than moments away from impaling me that I’d missed.

I sagged in defeat and beat my head against the now padded ground. Groaning loudly I flipped myself on to my back.

“So not fair.” I mumbled.

“That was the best one yet.” A disgustingly cheerful voice said. I groaned again at Hugo’s optimism. A large horn sounded and the voices of the technicians monitoring the gauntlet were once again discernable. The whiteness around me transformed back into the training gym-like space that had always been there.

I cracked one eye open and craned my neck to watch his approach. “I am not convinced the other hunters run the same gauntlets as me. If they did, there

wouldn't be any active hunters. This trial is truly impossible. If I'm not going to be skewered by a berserker hybrid demon, which doesn't even exist in real life by the way, then I'm being decapitated, drowned, slimed or wait for it, it's my personal favorite . . . squished by a fat demon that moves literally too fast for the laws of physics. I stand by my previous statement. There should not be things that don't actually exist that we have to fight. And," I ticked a finger in the air, "I should be able to use the fire from my sword during these trials. It makes these challenges completely obsolete." Hugo stood patiently behind my head, with his own bent down to look me in the eyes as I finished my rant. His upside-down face glowing with amusement.