

## Shard Warriors: Origins

### Part 2

Norman Venitus stared into the mirror, eyes on the glowing white gem embedded in his chest. A tiny, white Shard. And, next to it, a second Shard. One White and one Purple.

"More," he whispered, echoing the voices inside his head. "I need *more*. I need them all..."

His eyes drifted to the scar. The long, jagged, white line stretching from his finger to the White Shard. An echo of that agony blazed in his mind, a memory of burning anguish. The cost of claiming the White Shard and its unique power.

He raised his scarred hand, his once-torn finger, moved it to his chest. When it came into contact with the White Shard, he *felt* the thrum of power. The vibration. The *voice*.

*More.*

Behind it, the Purple Shard spoke to him.

*Control them. Manipulate them. Make them submit.*

He pulled his hand away, reached for his shirt. A minute later, he left the restroom fully dressed – shirt and lab coat and kindly smile. The clothes felt itchy and uncomfortable against his chest. Unnatural. But he tolerated it. Kept the mask in place.

Back in the lab, Robert was waiting for him. Looking even more uncertain and lost than usual.

They got to work; replicating Shards, testing them on mice and rats, attempting to remove Shards safely, failing. It was Robert's pet project. The man wanted to find a way to separate Norman from the White Shard. Save him from whatever 'side-effects' the Shard might have.

A pointless endeavour. Even if there *was* a way to remove a bonded Shard, Norman would reject it.

The White Shard was a part of him now. It *was* him.

Being separated from it? The very notion was absurd.

Still, he let Robert have his fun. Testing the Shards, looking for some pointless 'cure'. He played along, let the man believe he was doing something good. And, all the while, Norman planned his next ventures. His *private* experiments.

"Have you heard?" Robert asked, holding a Red Shard with a pair of tweezers. "Another missing person. A bodybuilder this time..."

"Really?" Norman asked, feigning ignorance. "How bizarre."

*That* particular experiment had been a dud. A failure, in so much as he'd learned nothing new from it. A person's body before Shard-Mutation, and their monstrous form after it, seemed to have no correlation. The bodybuilder's altered form had been no larger or stronger than any other.

Robert's eyes flicked to him, expression unreadable.

Did he suspect? It was quite possible...

Norman shrugged.

"Best not to worry about it," he said, returning his attention to the work at hand. Mind drifting to his next experiment. One he was *certain* would provide stimulating results. "Did you set aside replicas of all the Shards yet? I'd very much like to have them all catalogued and stored away safely by the end of the day."

"I did," Robert said. "Two full sets containing all Shards, with the exception of White. Once we find a way to safely remove it from you, we'll be able to replicate it too."

Norman resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

Remove the White Shard? Never.

He was certain. Absolutely, completely sure.

And yet, that tiny voice of doubt remained. The last vestiges of human weakness. The little whisper in the back of his mind, telling him this was a mistake, that he should back out now.

Thankfully, the other voices drowned out that weakness.

*Do it*, the White Shard demanded.

*Dominate*, the Purple echoed.

Norman raised his gloved hand, examined the Red Shard.

"Fire," he knew. "And Purple is the mind."

He'd learned that quickly enough, when he'd used its power to secure funding. A theory that'd been reinforced and solidified every time he'd used the Purple's power to snare a new test subject.

Purple was mind. Red was fire. Yellow was speed. Orange was strength. Blue contained hydrokinetic powers. Aquamarine granted the ability to generate electricity. All the Shards had unique powers, their own areas of divinity.

And White... White was *special*.

It was the Shard that controlled the others. The power to dominate all other powers. The Shard of Deity.

With it, Norman was a *god*.

He stared at the Red Shard a few moments longer, basking in the whispers of the White and Purple. Then, smiling, he pressed the Red Shard to his chest. Gasp.

A moment of burning pain. A tremble of energy passing through his entire body. For a single, brief instant, he felt every single cell in his body vibrate. The Shard-Mutation attempting to take hold, and the White Shard resisting it. Then the moment passed.

Norman stood up straight, ripped the glove off his hand, raised his fingers.

And there, on his fingertips, tiny flames erupted.

He willed them higher, watched as the amber lights danced and swam. Intertwined. Watched as the flames grew higher and higher, licking the ceiling and the walls, as they danced over his clothes and tickled his skin.

*Burn!* The Red Shard whispered to him. *Burn it all!*

The urge to listen, to unleash the Red in all its might, was tempting. Burn his secret underground lab to ash, set the city above ablaze, burn the whole *world*.

*Incinerate!*

But he fought the temptation, set the Red's desire aside.

With a wave of his hand, the inferno around him vanished. Blackened walls and the foul stench of burning persisted, but both were easy enough to ignore.

He picked up his glove again which, thankfully, was still in one piece – albeit singed a little.

Then he opened up the metal box, stared down at two dozen Shards, each a different colour. A different power. It took him a few seconds to decide. Then, smiling, three voices whispering inside his head, he reached for the Green Shard.

"You look like shit," Robert said. "Rough night?"

"Couldn't sleep," Norman grunted. Too many voices. Too loud. All wanting something, all talking over each other.

"Yeah," Robert chuckled. "A new-born will do that to you."

That chuckle - that *laugh* - was like nails on a chalkboard. Screeching inside Norman's skull, echoing there along with two dozen other voices.

"Pretty sure we have some painkillers around here somewhere. Want me to go grab 'em for you?"

"No," Norman grunted. "I'm fine."

He'd tried painkillers. He'd tried a *lot* of painkillers. But the Shards had 'protected' him from their effects. Just like they'd 'protected' him from alcohol, from sleeping pills, from

bashing his head against a wall.

The downsides of being indestructible.

"If you say so," Robert said with another grating chuckle. "Come on, I made some interesting discoveries last night."

*Burn him! The Shards demanded. Drown him! Electrocute! Incinerate! Eviscerate! Obliterate!*

"What discoveries?" Norman groaned.

"It's to do with the meteorite itself, the strange mineral it's made up of. It's metallic; that much we already knew. But the type of metal isn't like anything we see here on Earth. When I was testing it..."

Norman zoned him out. Focused on the voices.

He felt the White Shard. Felt its hum. Its impulse reverberating through him. His body, aching from two-dozen Shards embedded in his chest. He couldn't think. Couldn't concentrate.

"...Like it has a mind of its own," Robert was saying. "Or, perhaps, that it can be inscribed with 'memory'. It's incredibly adaptive, that much is for sure..."

All of them. All trying to guide him. Two dozen angels on his shoulder, trying to show him the right way. Yet they were all talking over each other. An incoherent, jumbled mess. Even Norman's own thoughts; they were lost in the quiet cacophony.

Only once voice stood out. One will.

*Divinity. Dominate. Rule. Prepare.*

"...I think, if we make a tool from that metal, it might be able to safely remove bonded Shards. The mineral certainly has some ability to channel and protect Shards. It's the only way to explain how the Shards survived re-entry..."

Norman stood, cutting off Robert's annoying monologue.

Without a word, ignoring his assistant's confused questioning, Norman strode out of their shared lab. Kept walking and walking, even as his chest ached and thrummed with dozens of different beats. He ignored the voices. All of them but one.

*You are God, it whispered to him. This world is yours.*

Wealth was surprisingly easy. As simple as finding those who possessed it and compelling them to share.

In that, the Purple was the most powerful of the Shards. All save the White. Power over the mind? What was pyrokinesis or super-strength compared to *that*? It took him only days to find his first loyal followers. Wealthy patrons with weak minds. Powerful people in high places.

Within a week, he'd funded several labs and safehouses; places he could experiment on the Shards away from prying eyes. He'd set up a business to absorb 'donations' from his new followers.

Next, he'd need *reach*. A network of followers to spread the word of their new God. Lay the foundations of his empire.

*That* would take some time.

But time was nothing to a God.

He stared down at the limp body. The corpse of a janitor.

How bothersome.

He'd entered the lab, had caught this fool looking through Shard research documents, and his impulses had kicked in. Norman had felt his skin ripple, felt his hands twist into talons, his teeth sharpen into fangs. A moment later, he'd been flying at the man, all claws and fangs and horns.

As soon as the violent haze had ended, he'd found himself standing here. Towering over a dead man.

He felt no shame or guilt. Just annoyance.

Killing was fine. He'd done *that* plenty of times since discovering the Shards and their powers. Experimenting on people, disposing of them when his tests were concluded, was a natural part of the scientific process. Corpses were nothing new to him.

But this... This was different.

Too close to home.

It'd be much more difficult to cover *this* up. Even if he got rid of the body, he'd still have a missing janitor at his workplace. People would ask questions. *Robert* would ask questions. Which meant Norman would have to use the Purple, empty minds and erase thoughts. He'd have to dispose of the body in such a way as to deflect any potential suspicion.

What a hassle.

And his body... It'd mutated.

The White was meant to prevent that. Make him immune to Shard-Mutation. And yet, for those few moments, he *had* mutated. Grown fangs and horns and claws. Had torn right through his own clothes. He was back to normal now – the mutation had been temporary – but it *had* happened.

Curious.

But he'd have time to think on that later.

Right now, he needed to hide the body. Put on some spare clothing. Clean up the blood.

Robert would be here soon. No time to waste.

"You've been using the Shards," Robert said from behind him.

Norman didn't look away from the microscope, kept his gaze on the magnified mineral dust. Why did the silvery material seem to move away from his gaze? Why did it seem to be repelled by him?

"All those missing people," his associate continued, voice cold and calm. "You took them. You experimented on them with Shards, didn't you?"

"Yes," Norman said, still not looking up.

"Did you kill them too?"

With how hollow Robert's voice sounded, Norman felt a glimmer of hope. Maybe – just maybe – he wouldn't have to use the Purple after all. If Robert was able to see things analytically, was able to look past human emotion, he'd see why it'd all been necessary. If he were a true man of science, he'd understand that-

Thump.

Before he knew what was happening, Norman was falling. Microscope crashing down onto the floor next to him.

Red filled his vision. A spike of pain in the back of his skull.

Robert had attacked him!

Struck the back of his head with something – bludgeoned him.

If he'd been able to in that moment, Norman would've laughed. He could already feel the Green Shard flaring, ready to heal any injury. Could feel Orange blazing, ready to fill him with unnatural strength.

But nothing happened.

Power flared and then vanished. Flared, and disappeared.

Two dozen voices screamed in Norman's head.

And, at the back of his skull, where a chunk of rock was lodged in his head, those voices went quiet.

A fragment of the meteorite. The mineral inside it.

It was suppressing the Shards.

Robert stepped around him, looked down at Norman with a mixture of pity and guilt.

He shook his head, walked over to a cupboard filled with chemicals. One by one, he smashed jars of flammable fluids around the lab. Then, mournfully, Robert lit a match and tossed it.

The lab was ablaze in seconds.

Norman woke in hellfire.

An inferno so hot an intense, it was blinding. The air so thick with smoke, it was suffocating. And yet, he rose to his feet untroubled. Flames licked his skin, but there was no pain. Only comfort. Satisfaction.

So long as he possessed a Red Shard, fire wouldn't harm him.

He looked down at the floor, saw a lump of space-rock where his head had been moments before. Covered in blood and gore, but otherwise unremarkable. An ordinary, inert rock with some alien mineral inside it.

It must've fallen out of his broken skull while he'd been unconscious.

He raised a hand, touched the back of his head. Felt only hair. An undamaged skull. Fully healed.

The Shards whispered to him.

And he listened.

Yes. Yes, this *was* an excellent opportunity.

He could disappear. Vanish. Leave the janitor's corpse where his own body was supposed to be. In flames these hot, the corpse would be rendered unidentifiable. Everyone – especially Robert – would assume he was dead. Killed in the fire.

It was perfect.

His grand plan... It'd take years. *Decades*. And being able to exist in the shadows, an unknown entity, would make the task that much easier.

Yes... The White's voice was right.

*This* was it. The beginning of *everything*.