

**THE
DECISION**

DUDLEY MUTATINA

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“Quiet! They’re about to announce the next Arbiter!”

“Here’s hoping they end whatever game we’re in,” I mumbled. Maybe this Arbiter would finally decide, ‘You know what? Humans *aren’t* worth saving after all.’

The Decision happened at the end of every century. One person was selected at random to decide whether to continue the ‘game of life’ or end it all. No one knew who or what was controlling it, but not wanting to take the risk, every Arbiter chose ‘Continue’.

My friends readied their champagne bottles as the countdown began. “3...2...1!” The clocks froze just before midnight. We waited on bated breath.

Everyone jumped as my wrist buzzed, breaking the silence. I checked my watch. My heart dropped.

31 December 2099, 23:59:59

Congratulations Jonah, you are this century’s Arbiter!

Please make The Decision to

CONTINUE OR **END GAME**

At the same time, my name and profile popped up on the TV.

“Well folks, looks like this year’s Arbiter is...24 year old Jonah.”

“Jonah, if you’re watching this, we know you’ll make the right decision.”

My mouth went dry and I stood frozen in place. All eyes fell on me. My chest rose and fell quickly. *This can’t be right. Why me?*

I swallowed hard. Nev glanced between me and the watch. “You’re...still thinking about it.” I couldn’t tell if it was a question or a statement.

He was right. I hadn’t decided yet. Why hadn’t I chosen yet? How much time had passed? It should’ve been an easy choice...so why was I hesitating?

“I need some air.” I went out to the back porch and leaned on the railing. I let out a long, shaky breath and watched it float into the night air. A blanket of snow covered the yard and

sloped down to a large lake. Moonlight reflected off its glassy surface. Everything was calm out here, unaware of the stakes. I knew what to choose but...

What if I didn't?

The news anchors chuckled nervously, *"It's been five minutes now. You know Jonah, the Arbiter usually would've decided by now--"* The door closed, muffling the sound.

Nev gave me a concerned look. I shook my head. "What do I do?" I checked my watch as another alert came through.

Would you like to view a global time lapse of the last century?

YES OR **NO**

I scoffed. "What'll it show me that I haven't already seen?"

"Couldn't hurt--"

"Six wars. Thirteen terrorist attacks. Half the world's sinking into the oceans, the other half's on fire. Hate groups are still running rampant. Hell, we can't go to school, concerts, church, or anywhere without a gun to protect ourselves. Even if I choose 'continue'--" My entire body shook. Cold air stung my lungs with each breath. "People won't change."

Nev nodded to the others inside. "What about them?"

I stared at the lake, searching for an answer beneath its icy surface. "I'd be saving them some trouble."

"Shouldn't everyone get the chance to change?"

I groaned and held my head between my hands. "I hate this I hate this I hate this." I looked up at Nev. "You don't seem as worried as everyone else."

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't." He chuckled nervously. "Was kind of hoping you would've picked by now."

The door opened and two police officers walked out. Our friends looked on uncomfortably. Behind them, the TV droned on.

"It's, uh, it's been quite some time now, Jonah. The world's waiting on you."

"You saw that recap. The boy's in a tough position."

"Tough decision my ass. He should still--"

One of the officers closed the door.

“Jonah?”

“T-That’s me,” I stammered.

“We’re just here to make sure you make the right decision.” Their hands hovered over their weapons. *You mean here to arrest me if I end the world?*

Why past Arbiters chose to keep going was beyond me. After everything they’d seen? I was sure the last one regretted their decision within just those first twenty years. *Then again, what if it wasn’t their decision after all?*

I swallowed hard as everything clicked. “Don’t worry, I’ve already made my decision,” I said slowly. I hopped up and sat on the railing. The officers immediately pulled out their stun guns. *I knew it.*

Nev raised his hands in the air. I kept my position on the railing. My heart nearly beat right out of my chest.

“Don’t be stupid, son.”

“Press ‘continue’ and we can all enjoy the rest of the night.”

I’d be damned before I let anyone pressure me into making their decision. I smiled at Nev. If I was gonna make a decision, it was gonna be on my terms.

I flung myself off the balcony and into a pile of snow. I scrambled to my feet and slid down towards the lake.

“Jonah!” Nev shouted.

Both officers jumped off the balcony and were in hot pursuit. I got to the edge of the lake and took a tender step onto the ice. Then another. And another. It held. I picked up my pace and shuffled across. The officers hesitated.

“You’re making a mistake!”

I rolled my eyes. *This is what’s best for all of us.* I neared the center of the lake and turned around. The officers shuffled unsteadily towards me, weapons drawn. People from the neighboring houses spilled out onto their balconies.

“Is that him? Is that the guy?”

“Just fucking choose already!”

“Kids these days. Always so eager to die.”

I glanced down at my wrist. Time was still frozen at 23:59:59. The stars in the sky hadn't moved in the slightest. The world was suspended in time until I decided what happened next. The thought made me shiver. Or maybe it was the cold.

I forced my legs to keep moving. The ice creaked and groaned with each step, threatening to give out at any second.

“What the hell is he doing?”

“He's gonna kill us all!”

“Stop him!”

“Off yourself after if you wanna die that bad!”

“Yeah! Leave us out of it!”

I re-opened the Decision prompt. Whatever I decided, it would be *my* decision.

CONTINUE OR **END GAME**

My finger hovered over my options. Then a deafening crack like shattering glass echoed through the air.

And the icy water swallowed me whole.