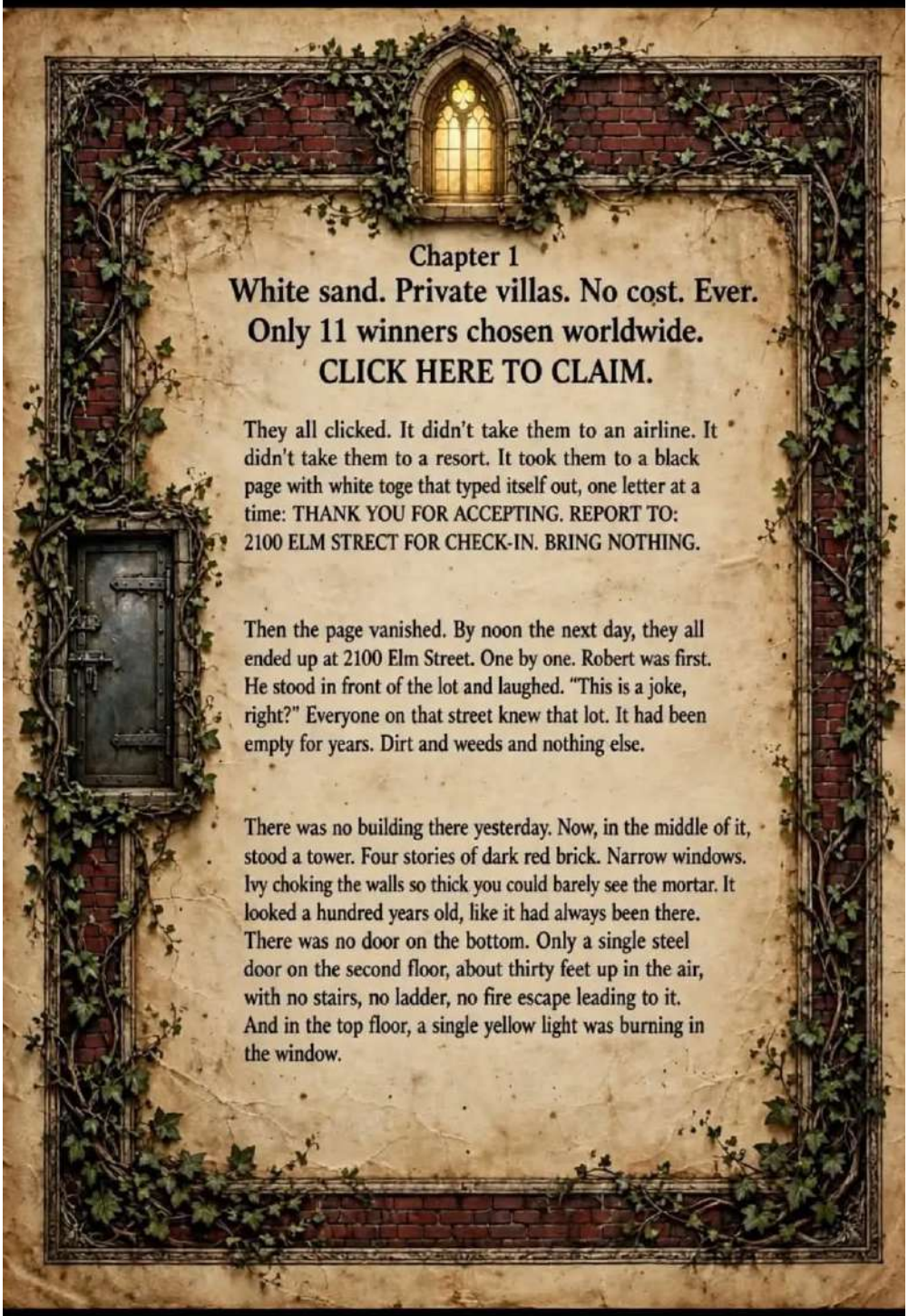

FREE
YOUR PURCHASE
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Author
Carlos Johnson CEO
THE TOWER ON
2100 ELM STREET



Chapter 1

White sand. Private villas. No cost. Ever. Only 11 winners chosen worldwide. CLICK HERE TO CLAIM.

They all clicked. It didn't take them to an airline. It didn't take them to a resort. It took them to a black page with white toge that typed itself out, one letter at a time: THANK YOU FOR ACCEPTING. REPORT TO: 2100 ELM STRECT FOR CHECK-IN. BRING NOTHING.

Then the page vanished. By noon the next day, they all ended up at 2100 Elm Street. One by one. Robert was first. He stood in front of the lot and laughed. "This is a joke, right?" Everyone on that street knew that lot. It had been empty for years. Dirt and weeds and nothing else.

There was no building there yesterday. Now, in the middle of it, stood a tower. Four stories of dark red brick. Narrow windows. Ivy choking the walls so thick you could barely see the mortar. It looked a hundred years old, like it had always been there. There was no door on the bottom. Only a single steel door on the second floor, about thirty feet up in the air, with no stairs, no ladder, no fire escape leading to it. And in the top floor, a single yellow light was burning in the window.

5:56 4G

Chapter 2

It was a Tuesday in Mexico and none of them knew each other. At 2:10 AM, 11 different phones lit up in 11 different houses.

The messages were identical. No saved contact, no number—just an email delivered with no sender address. The subject line read: "Sahara Islands Vacation — Your Group Reservation is Confirmed for Oct 31."

None of the 11 had booked anything. None had ever heard of the Sahara Islands. Maps showed nothing by that name, only endless blue ocean off the coast of West Africa, small unmarked islets some called the Sahara Islands on old sailor charts, abandoned for decades.

When they opened the email, it was a single black page, only white text, stark against the darkness. It listed eleven names, eleven addresses, and at the very bottom: "Meet at 2100 Elm Street. Come alone. The tower is waiting."

By dawn they had all searched it. 2100 Elm Street didn't exist in their city. It didn't exist on any map. Yet at noon photographs began appearing in the email thread they'd never joined—timestamped, showing an empty lot overrun by weeds, chain-link fence collapsed, and the same text scrawled on the fence in peeling paint: 2100 ELM.

That night, Robert drove to the location on the outskirts. There was only an empty lot where a warehouse once stood, now dirt and broken concrete, weeds grown grown high. At the far end, where there had been nothing yesterday, a tower now rose against the moon. Black stone, impossibly tall, narrow windows like slits, ivy choking its walls, no doors, no light, only the quiet hum coming from within.

His phone lit up again. The black page appeared once more, white text now reading: "He is here. You are next."

Chapter 3

Vines everywhere, thick as arms. And it was noisy. Everywhere, whispers. Not from animals. From the trees.
Cindy put her hand on a tree and jerked it back.
That tree just said my name! It had.
All the trees were whispering their names.

CHRIS. ALAN. CINDY. DANAH. DAVID.
P PATTY. WILLIAM. LAURA. JOSE. ROBERT.

In the middle of the jungle, there was a clearing.
And in the clearing, ten hammocks, tied between trees. Euith a name carved into the tree above it.
And in each hammock, a skeleton,
wearing the same clothes they were wearing now.
Laura screamed.
Robert ran to his hammock and saw
his own skull grinning up at him,
wearing his watch. The whispers
got louder, turning into one voice —
The Host — coming from every tree at once.

YOU ALWAYS STOP ON FLOOR 3.
YOU GET TIRED. YOU LIKE TO REST.
TAKE A NAP.

Chapter 4

They didn't mean to sleep. Laura said it first - Just five minutes. One by one, they lay down in the hammocks. Even Robert, who swore he wouldn't. Then they dreamed the same dream. They were back in the Tower.

Floor 3.
A long hallway with 11 doors. Each door had their name n it, crved in the same handwriting as the trees. Behind each doors v. a bed was waiting. Clean sheets. A glase of water. A note that said: STAY.

Cindy woke up screaming. Her hammock was empty. Her skeleton was gone. In its place was a small, folded blanket, warm like someone had just been sleeping there. And the trees started whispering again - but this time, only one name: Robert.

Chapter 5

Don't listen, William said. We go back. We find the door we came in through. There was no door. There was no Tower anymore. Just jungle, thick and endness in every direction. Then Jose found it. A spiral staircase growing right out of the ground, made of black stone, just like the Tower. It went DOWN, not up. They They went down because there was nowhere else to go. At the bottom was Floor 4. Not a jungle. A kitchen. A long table. Eleven plates. Eleven chairs. Steam still rising off the food. And at the head of the table, a cfbairr that was biggur thas bigger than the rest, with a name carved into it: THE HOST.

Chapter 6

Don't eat it, Chris said. It's a trick.
But David was already hungry. They were all hungry. The food smelled like home. Like each of their homes.
Cindy's plate smelled like her grandmotter's soup. Robert's smelled like the [illegible] barbecue his dad used to make. The Host's voice came from everywhere and nowhere: You are guests. Guests eat.
Jose picked up his fork. When he did, the lights flickered, and for half a second, they didn't see food. They saw dirt. And bones. And little white teeth in the soup.
Jose dropped the fork. Nope, he said. I'm good. I'm not hungry anymore. The Host laughed. It sounded like wind through trees.
Then you will be hungry on Floor 5. 5.

Chapter 7

Floor 5 was all mirrors. Not glass mirrors. Water mirrors. The floor was a shallow pool, and every step they took rippled their reflections. Only the reflections weren't doing what they were doing. Cindy's reflection was still sitting at the dinner table,
eating.
Alan's reflection was waving at him to come closer. Robert's reflection wasn't Robert at all. It was the skeleton from the hammock, wearing Robert's watch, smiling up at him. Don't look down, Laura screamed.

Walk looking straight ahead! But Danah looked. And Danah saw herself - older. Much older. Much older.
Gray hair. Wrinkled hands. Still in
this Tower. Still walking.
We have to get out, she whispered.
This place doesn't kill you. It keeps you.
At the end of the hall,
At the end of the hall, a door opened by itself.

A sign above it said:

FLOOR 6: THE SAHARA ISLANDS.

Chapter 8

They expected sand. They expected the vacation from the email. They got it. White sand. Private villas. No cost. Ever. It was exactly like the ad. Eleven villas in a row, each with their name on the door. The ocean was that impossible blue, the sky was perfect, the air smelled like coconut. It's a trap, William said. But his voice sounded tired. Tired in a way that made him sound like he wanted to believe it anyway. Inside each villa was a bed. phone. And on the phone, one new message: You can stay.

Everyone else will forget you ever left. You will be happy here. All you have to do is forget them.
Patty almost did. She sat on the bed and stared at the phone for a long time. Then she heard Laura outside, screaming her name - not the whispering trees, the real Laura - and Patty ran out barefoot. I almost forgot y you, she said, crying. I almost I almost forgot all of you. The villas began to sink into the sand, one by one. The ocean turned black. The Host's voice was
softer now, almost sad: No one ever chooses the others.

Chapter 9

Back in the Tower. Back to the long hallway with 11 doors. Only now, 10 doors were closed. One was open. Robert's door. Inside was not a bed. It was the first room they ever saw. The black page. The white text. It read: One must stay to let ten go. That is the rule. That is always the rule. Robert understood first. That's why the trees whispered his name first. Thats why his skeleton was grinning. He had been chosen - or he had chosen himself a long time ago, when he drove to 2100 Elm Street alonethat night to check. I went first, Robert said. So I stay last. That makes sense. No! No! Cindy grabbed his arm. We don't we leave people. We do, Robert said, and he smiled - a real smile, not the skeleton one. If we all stay, nobody ever tells anybody about this place. If one stays, ten can warn the next eleven. He stepped inside. The door closed.
The

The Tower shook.

Chapter 10

They woke up on Tuesday in Mexico. In their own beds. In their own houses. Phones dark. No email. No Tower. No jungle. For three days, they thought it was a dream. Then, at 2:10 AM on Friday, 10 phones lit up at the same time. One message. No sender.
Io subject. It was a photo. An empty lot n the outskirts of town. Weeds.
A chain-link ledle. And in peeling paint on the fence: 2100 ELM.
And underneeth, in white toxt on a black page:
He is here.
You are next.

- R. Laura put her phone down.
She was shaking, but she wasn't scared the way she was before. She picked up her keys.
She called Cindy. She called Danah. She called all of them.
Because Robert stayed so they could go.
And now they were going back
- together.

Chapter 11

They drove back together. Ten cars in a line, headliges on, at 2:10 AM. No one talked on the phone. No one needed to. They all knew where they were going. 2100 Elm was not empty anymore. The Tower was back. Taller than before. Darker than before. And on the front door, in fresh white paint, one word:
WELCOME.

Laura was the first to get out. She put her hand on the door. It was warm. Like something inside was breathing.

Are we really doing this? Danah asked.

We have to, Cindy said. He stayed for us. Now we stay for him.

The door opened by itself. Inside was not the jungle. Not the kitchen. Not the mirrors. Inside was a single room. And in the middle of the room, sitting in the Host's chair, was Robert. Alive. Older. Tired. Smiling.

I knew you'd come back, he said.

The Host looked at them all and said: Then the game changes. Now there are eleven again.

Chapter 12

Robert stood up from the Host's chair. Slowly.
Like his bones remembered every floor he had
lived through alone. You shouldn't have come
back, he said. But his eyes were wet. He was glad
they did. The Host was gone. Or maybe the Host
was Robert now. No one could tell anymore.
On the table were eleven keys. Eleven envelopes.
Eleven new names. Not theirs. New names.
Strangers who would get the email next
Tuesday in Mexico. The Tower always
needs eleven, Robert said. That's the rule.
But now we know the rule. And if
we know it, we can break it.

Laura picked up a key. It was warm. It was heavy.
It had her name on it, but scratched out.
Underneath, a new name was carved:

THE NEXT HOST.
She looked at Robert. She looked at all of them.
Then she put the key down.
No, she said. We don't pick a Host.
We end it.
The Tower groaned. The walls shook.
And for the first time since they
arrived, the Tower sounded afraid.

Chapter 13

How do you end a place that isn't a place? That was Alan's question.

He was an engineer. He needed a door to lock, a wire to cut, a switch to flip. The Tower had none of those. It had rules. And rules can be broken.

Cindy found it first. In the Host's chair, carved underneath, in tiny litts: TO END IT, ALL ELEVEN MUST SAY NO AT THE SAME TIME. Not one. Not ten. All lleven.
Together.

That's why it always split them up, Robert said. Jungle. Kitchen. Mirrors. Islands. It never wanted them together. Because together, they were stronger than it.

They stood in a circle. They held hands. Robert's hands were cold. Laura's were shaking. Danah started crying, but she didn't let go.

On three, Laura said. One. Two. Three. NO.

The lights went out. The Tower screamed. And when the lights came back, they were standing in an empty lot. No Tower. No chairs. No keys. Just weeds. And eleven people holding hands in the rain.

Chapter 14

The rain stopped. The lot was quiet. For the first time in weeks, no phones lit up. No whispers. No Host. They laughed. It started with Jose - a tired, shaky laugh - and then it spread to all eleven of them, standing in wet clothes in the weeds, laughing like they had just survived something no one would ever believe. And they had. But when they got home, things were different. different.

Chris kept checking his phone at 2:10 AM. Every night. Just in case. Patty couldn't sleep sleep in a bed. She slept on the floor for a month. Danah kept dreaming of mirrors. David kept dreaming of soup that had teeth in it. They were were free.

But free doesn't mean the same.

Robert stayed quiet the longest. One night, night, Laura found him sitting in his car outside 2100 Elm, just just staring at the empty lot.

I miss it, he said, and he sounded ashamed. It was the only place I ever felt needed.

Laura sat next to him.

You are needed here, she said.

And she meant it.

Chapter 15

Three months passed. No Tower. No emails. Life tried to go back to normal, but normal felt like a costume that didn't fit anymore. Then William got a letter. Not an email. A real letter, in a real envelope, with no return address. Inside was a single photo. The empty lot at 2100 Elm. And in the weeds, something small and white, half-buried. A bone. William called everyone. They met at the lot at noon, not 2:10 AM. Daylight felt safer. It wasn't. They dug. They found eleven small bones. Arranged in a circle. Exactly like they had stood when they said NO. And underneath the bones, a new black page. White text: YOU ENDED THE TOWER. YOU DID NOT END ME.

The Host was not the Tower.
The
The Tower was just where the Host lived. The Host could live anywhere. In a phone. In a mirror. In a dream.

Cindy dropped the page. It didn't burn. It didn't tear. It just lay there, smiling in white efre.
Then all lleven phones buzzed at once.
One message:
One message: See you Tuesday.

Chapter 16

Tuesday came. Nothing happened at 2:10 AM. No buzz. No email. They almost believed it was over. Then Tuesday at 2:10 PM, in broad daylight, it started. Laura's mirror blinked. reflection. The mirror itself. Like an eye opening. Cindy's phone turned on by itself and showed a photo of her own kitchen, from behind her.Danah heard whispering in her shower, even with the water off. The Host wasn't in one place anymore. It was in all their places. Little pieces. A voice in the walls. A face in the TV static. A shadow that was a second too slow. Robert knew what to do. He had lived with it longest.

You don't run from it,

he said. You look at it. You make it real, and then it can't hide.

So that night, all eleven got on one video call. They left their cameras on. They left their mirrors uncovered. And when the Host tried to whisper, they whispered back - together: We see you. The screens flickered. Eleven faces.

One extra face, in the middle, smiling.

And then it

And then it was gone.

Chapter 17

After the video call, it went quiet. Too quiet. For two weeks, no whispers, no flickers, no extra faces. They started to hope again. Then Laura found a notebook on her porch. No name. No note. Just her handwriting on every page. Things she didn't remember writing.
Page 1: Don't trust Robert.
Page 2: He stayed because he wanted to.
Page 3: He is the Host now.
Laura's hands shook. She didn't want to believe it. But she had seen Robert sit in the Host's chair. She had seen him smine when the Tower came back. She called Cindy.
Cindy had a notebook too. Same handwriting. Same pages. So did all ileven.
Eleven notebooks.
Eleven versions of the same warning.
That night, they met at the lot.
Robert was already there. He was holding his own notebook. He opened it.
It was blank.. Every page blank.
He looked at them, hurt and confused.

If I was the Host, he said, why would my pages be
Then a twilfth notebook fell from the sky.
It landed in the middle of their circle.
On the cover,
in white aids:

THE HOST'S NOTEBOOK
And it was full.

Chapter 18

Nobody touched the twelfth notebook. Not at first.
It sat in the middle of their circle, breathing.
Then Laura did what she always did. She picked it up.
She opened it. Inside was not a warning. Inside was the truth.
Page 1: The Host was never one person.
Page 2: The Host was the Tower.
Page 3: The Tower was made from all of you.
Every fear. Every secret.
Every time you said NO and meant YES. Robert was not the Host. You all were.
All eleven. Together.
That's why it could never be ended alone.
And Ani it could could only be started again together. Laura closed the notebook.

Laura closed the notebook. She looked at all of them.
The Host's notebook is empty now, she said.
Because we wrote it. And we can close it.

They stood in a circle one last time.
They held hands. They did not say NO.
They said something stronger.
They said: WE ARE DONE.
The lot went silent.
The notebooks turned to dust. The phones went dark.
For good this time.
Or so they thought.
Because that night, at 2:10 AM, in a town far away, eleven strangers got an email.
Same subject. Same time. Same address:
2100 Elm.
THE END... TO BE CONTINUED

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