

1991.

Solomon was my best friend. We shared a birthday.

We always had a party around his house. It had two bathrooms. Back then, I couldn't imagine why any house would need *two* bathrooms.

It was our sixteenth. We didn't know what to do. Balloons and cake were for kids. The pub needed ID. Solomon had an idea.

"I can run a game," he said. "You know... a birthday party."

We laughed and agreed. We had no clue.



Oh, hello Dominic! And you've brought Angela! Goodness me. Is she joining the big boys today?

It's hard to think of Solomon's mum now. Back then, I didn't think of her at all.

I just viewed her as a bourbon biscuit dispensing machine and the only person outside my family to use my first name.

Angela came because she was distraught after the dog died. I stopped her wailing by saying she could come.

Can I be a cyberpunk?

Maybe!
For the last time, Angela, I have no idea what we're playing.

I'd have been a better brother if I hadn't.

If I hadn't treated her like a friend, I'd have saved her all of this.

Hey, hey! At last! Ash makes his entrance!

...plus, in her debut appearance-- Ash's *smoking* sister!

Chuck. Not actually American, for all his pretensions.

John Belushi in *Animal House*, with the coke swapped for sherbet.



Chuck, will you *please* give it a rest.

Matthew. Smart. Painfully quiet. The one black kid in a Midlands metal crowd.

Even *before* his mum died, the most depressed of all of us.

I'd become better friends with him since then, as I'd been seeing less of Sol.

I...
I...

Sol's absence was primarily because of Isabelle. She was new to the school, and they'd started dating...

Well done, Gaylord of the Assrings. Can't even stand up for your sister.

Sit down. Sooner we start this, the sooner we can stop.

Ah, Isabelle. French. Adopted. Aggressively bilingual. Aggressively *everything*.

Never gave the impression of wanting to game, but played anyway.

And Sol.

You won't want to stop. Even you, Izzy. This is something I've made for Ash to celebrate his sixteenth.

It's...kind of a...fantasy game?



It was 1991 and we were arrogant RPG elitists plus a younger sister who really wanted to be a cyberpunk.

You can imagine how well that went down.



Guys, you don't get it. It's not some piece of D&D off-the-shelf in a box!

This isn't a dungeon bash. This isn't 10' by 10' rooms of orc genocide bullshit!

This is... *Thomas Covenant*. This is *RPG-Watchmen!* Hell, this is *Gormenghast*.



I can see my copy of *Gormenghast* from here, and it hasn't moved since I loaned you it.

I bet you haven't even read the *blurb*, you faker.



You have no idea how good this will be.

This is fantasy for grown-ups.



And we were sold.

Because we were deluded enough to think that's what we actually wanted.

We each got a sheet to develop our character. Guided freeform, selecting abilities and personalising them. Anything was permissible, if not always advisable.

I couldn't believe Sol had made this. He was always the golden child, but it was something else.

I loved it. I loved that he made it for me.


Part of me still does.

Okay, everyone done? Now for the special sauce...



...the dice.

Tell me about yourself.



My character's kind of a diplomat with teeth.

She's like a cross between Cleopatra and Machiavelli.

Nice. You're the *Dictator*.

This is the only D4 in the game. It's yours.

It's kind of a magical warrior? Turning emotions into power.

It's... pretty metal. Or goth, even.

It's both, *Grief Knight*.

This is the only D8 in the game. It's yours.

I'm a cyberpunk.

Of course you are, *Neo*.

D10. The only one.

Oh god,
I'm going to
hell...

I'm...
some kind
of atheist with
gods for
pets.

I kinda
picked some random
abilities.

I'm just
going to have
fun.

Naughty girl.
Godbinder.

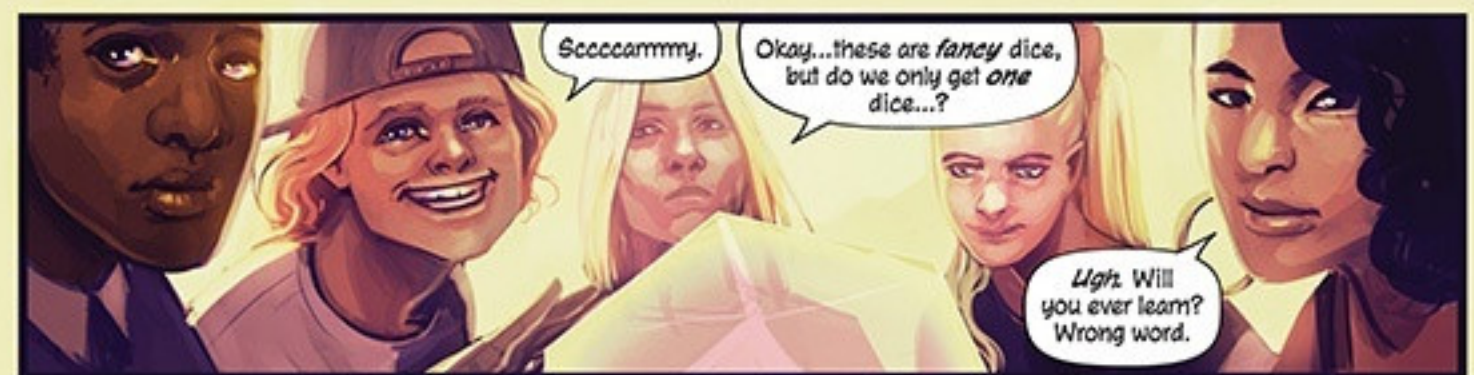
The
solitary D12.
It's yours.

Of
course you are,
Fool.

You get
this *entirely*
normal D6.

Boring.
So...
who gets
the D20?

I do.



I can't say what happens next.