

# [The host prologue: inserted](https://assignbuster.com/the-host-prologue-inserted/)

The Healer's name was Fords Deep Waters.

Because he was a soul, by nature he was all things good: compassionate, patient, honest, virtuous, and full of love. Anxietywas an unusual emotion for Fords Deep Water.

Irritation was even rarer. However, because Fords Deep Water lived inside a human body, irritation was sometimes inescapable.

As the whispers of the Healing students buzzed in the far corner of the operation room, his lips pressed together into a tight line.

The expression felt out of place on a mouth more often given to smiling.

Darren, his regular assistant, saw the grimace and patted his shoulder.

" They're just curious, Fords," he said quietly.

" An insertion is hardly an interesting or challenging procedure."

" Any soul on the street could perform it in an emergency. There is nothing for them to learn by observing today." Fords was surprised to hear the sharp edge marring his normally soothing voice.

" They've never seen a grown human before," Darren said.

Fords raised one eyebrow. " Are they blind to each other's faces? Do they not have mirrors?"

" You know what I mean ? C a wild human. Still soulless. One of the insurgents."

Fords looked at the girl's unconscious body, laid out facedown on the operating table.

Pity swelled in his heart as he remembered the condition the poor, broken body had been in when the Seekers had brought her to the Heeling facility. Such pain she'd endured??

Of course she was perfect now ? C completely healed.

Fords had seen to that.

" She looks the same as any of us," Fords murmured to Darren. " We all have human faces. And when she wakes up, she will be one of us, too."

" It's just exiting for them, that's all."

" The soul we implant today deserves morerespectthen to have her host body gawked at this way. She'll already have far too much to deal with as she acclimates."

" It's not fair to put her through this." Bythis, he did not mean the gawking.

Fords heard the sharp edge return to his voice.

Darren patted him again. " It will be fine. The Seekers needs information and-"

At the wordSeeker, Fords gave Darren a look that could only be described as a glare.

Darren blinked in shock.

" I'm sorry," Fords apologized at once. " I didn't mean to react so negatively. It's just that I fear for this soul."

His eyes moved to the cryotank on its stand beside the table. The light was a steady, dull read, indicating that it was occupied and in hibernation mode.

" This soul was specially picked for the assignment," Darren said soothingly.

" She is exceptional among our kind ? C braver than most. Her lives speak for themselves. I think she would volunteer, if it was possible to ask her."

" Who among us would not volunteer if we were asked to do something for the greater good? But is that really the case here? Is the greater good served by this?"

" The question is not her willingness, but what it is right to ask any soul to bear."

The Healing students were discussing the hibernating soul as well. Fords could hear the whispers clearly: their voices was rising now, getting louder with their excitement.

" She's lived on six planets."

" I heard seven."

" I heard she never lived two terms as the same host species."

" Is that possible?"

" She's been almost everything. A Flower, a Bear, a Spider-"

" A See Weed, a Bat-"

" Even a Dragon!"

" I don't believe it ? C not seven planets."

" At least seven. She started at the Orgin."

" Really? The Orgin?"

" Quiet, please!" Fords interrupted. " If you cannot observe professionally and silently, then I will have to ask you to remove yourselves."

Abashed, the six students fell silent and edged away from another.

" Let's go on with this, Darren."

Everything was prepared. The appropriate medicines were laid our beside

The human girl. Her long dark hair was secured beneath a surgical cap, exposing her slender neck. Deeply sedated, she breathed slowly in and out. Her sun-browned skin had barely a mark to show for her?? accident.

" Begin thaw sequence now, please, Darren."

The gray-haired assistant was already waiting beside the cryotank, his hand resting on the dial. He flipped the safety back and spun down the dial. The red light atop the small gray cylinder began to pulse, flashing faster as the seconds passed, changing color.

Fords concentrated on the unconscious body: he edged the scalpel through the skin at the base of the subject's skull with small, precise movements, and then sprayed the medication that stilled the excess flow of blood before he widened the fissure. Fords delved delicately beneath the neck muscles, careful not to injure them, exposing the pale bones at the top of the spinal column.

" The soul is ready, Fords," Darren informed him.

" So am I. Bring her."

Fords felt Darren at his elbow and knew without looking that his assistant would be prepared, his hand stretched out and waiting; they had worked together for many years now. Fords held the gap open.

" Send her home," he whispered.

Darren's hand moved into view, the silver gleam of an awaking soul in his palm.

Fords never saw an exposed soul without being struck by the beauty of it.

The soul shone in the brilliant lights of the operating room, brighter than the reflective silver instrument in his hand. Like a living ribbon, she twisted and rippled, stretching, happy to be free of the cryotank. Her thin, feathery attachments, nearly a thousand of them, billowed softly like pale silver hair. Though they were all lovely, this one seemed particularly graceful to Fords Deep Waters.

He was not alone in his reaction. He heard Darren's soft sigh, heard the admiring murmurs of the students.

Gently, Darren placed the small glistening creature inside the opening Fords had made in the human's neck. The soul slid smoothly into the offered space, weaving herself into the alien anatomy.

Fords admired the skill with which she possessed her new home.

Her attachments wound tightly into place around the nerve centers, some elongating and reaching deeper to where he couldn't see, under and up into the brain, the optic nerves, the ear canals. She was very quick, very firm in her movements. Soon, only one small segment of her glistening body was visible.

" Well done," he whispered to her, knowing that she could not hear him. The human girl was the one with ears, and she slept soundly.

It was a routine matter to finish the job. He cleaned and healed the wound, applied the salve that sealed the incision closed behind the soul, and then brushed the scar-softening powder across the line left on her neck.

" Perfect, as usual," said the assistant, who, for some reason unfathomable to Fords, had never made a change from his human host's name, Darren.

Fords sighted. " I regret this day's work."

" You're only doing your duty as a Healer."

" This is the rare occasion when Healing creates an injury."

Darren began to clean up the workstation. He didn't seem to know how to answer.

Fords was filling his Calling. That was enough for Darren.

But not enough for Fords Deep Waters, who was a true Healer to the core of his being. He gazed anxiously at the human female's body, peaceful in slumber, knowing that this peace would be shattered as soon as she awoke. All the horror of this young girl's end would be borne by the innocent soul he'd just placed inside her.

As he leaned over the human and whispered in her ear, Fords wished fervently that the soul inside could hear him now.

" Good luck, little wanderer, good luck. How I wish you didn't need it."