

Fanatical Publishing's

Weekly Review

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Original Prose is brought to you by [Lurk and his friends](#)

The four of them awoke in a narrow stone cell.

They were unbound, and soon had explored the limits of the small room. They weren't much.

It was about eight feet by ten feet, there was a narrow stone bench running on one of the narrow sides, and the opposite wall was made of iron bars in which a metal door was placed.

Lurk tried to pick the lock, then gave up in frustration.

Abraham was struck by a thought and turned to Rushell. "Could you try to magic the door open?" he asked.

Rushell shook his head. "I tried, but cannot perform magic here: I think she must have constructed this cell in such a way that spells cannot be cast from within."

"There must be some way to escape," Heather said.

"What do you think this is, a fairy tale?" Lurk scoffed. "You think I'm gonna just lean against the wall, and somehow push on the exact right place to hit some secret switch?" he said, folding his arms and leaning against the wall. Lurk was so intent on what he was saying, he didn't notice a small stone that moved slightly under his weight.

"And then, some hole is going to open in the solid stone wall," Lurk said, while a hole opened in the stone wall right beside him. "And if that actually happened," Lurk went on, completely oblivious to what was going on right next to him. "I suppose you'd expect me to go right on talking, completely oblivious to what was going on right next to me!"

"Lurk?" Rushell said, trying to get his attention.

"Don't interrupt me when I'm talking at you!" Lurk snapped. "Where was I? Yeah, that kind of thing happens all the time in fairy tales, but this is real life!"

"Lurk!" Abraham said.

"That sort of thing does not happen in real life!" Lurk bulldozed on. "You and me will go through our whole lives, and never see anything like that!"

"Lurk!" Heather barked.

"Oh shut up, I'm talking here!"

Abraham, Rushell and Heather exchanged a glance, then turned and walked right past Lurk into the secret passage

"Where you goin'?" Lurk exclaimed, then did a double-take. "What- hey, wait for me!"

As soon as he was through, the secret door shut, leaving no sign that the prisoners had ever been there.

1ST ADVENTURE OF IMMORTALITY

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Hey guys!! So let's just get the fact that this has a terrible title out of the way immediately. Next, I finally got down to doing the history part of it! YAY! I liked writing this a lot more than the other ones so looking forward to next week.

I tried to make this as historically accurate as I could. You know that people back then didn't really take priority for documentation of what was going down. I must give credit where credit is due so thank you to my editor, here is her deviantart account check out her stuff. <http://bewarethezombies.deviantart.com/> . And don't forget to checkout my deviantart! <http://pen-pen1996.deviantart.com/>

North West Greece

1101 BC

Casidina still had her short hair black hair. She had grown accustomed to the ease of taking care of her short hair and continued to cut it on a regular basis. The sun was shining down on the fields near where Casidina walked. It had been a long time since she had seen anything but her own kingdom. She had been looking forward to seeing what advances these people had made. However she had been sourly disappointed. It appeared to her that things had not evolved quite as far as her kingdom which evidently had raced ahead of the pack. It made sense when you thought about it. You didn't lose information that had been discovered because someone died. The information was all with the same person or group so they could continually work on the same project. A knight had been assigned to her for the trip and to her dismay Fince was walking next to her. He didn't have much of a sense of humor or personality in her opinion and only did as instructed. He bored her and she longed to talk to the people of the town. The people in the city she was visiting had almost no real civilization. She had spent the last few days getting versed in their simple dialect compared to the weeks she had anticipated having to spend learning.

In a shop off to the side a man was chipping away at a stone forming sharp edges. Casidina stopped to watch the man. In the corner of the room was dull yet still shining metal that he had discarded trying to get pure stone. "Fince, go tell that man that if he heats up that metal in the corner of the room and pounds it he can make something far more effective than stone." Casidina said to Fince pointing into the shop. Casidina knew that even with her short hair she didn't look enough like a boy to get away with just talk

to a man. Fince would be able to talk to the man without any prejudices. They would be talking man to man.

Fince did as he was instructed and explained the whole process to the man. The man looked skeptical but seemed to believe what he was being told for the most part. Fince returned and they continued on their way. They were leaving the region in search of some more advanced culture.

Time passed and Casidina completely forgot about the town and the man until she was sitting in the square of a city in Greece. Her hair had grown to shoulder length with jewels, ribbons, and flowers tied into it. While she was sitting in the square of town someone yelled a warning to everyone that the Dorians were here. People scattered knowing that the Dorians were trying to take the land. Fince grabbed Casidina picking her up and carrying her into safety. She was hanging over his shoulder which was digging into her stomach. He set her down at the dock trying to get the attention of the boat waiting for them.

The ship started to come in when someone grabbed Casidina's arm and turned her around. She was face to face with a man with brown hair and brown eyes. He started to bring a sword down on her thinking she was of a diplomatic family due to the jewels in her hair and the body guard at her side. She screamed loud and high pitched as the sword which seemed to be moving in slow motion came closer to her. Fince whirled around and drew a dagger from his belt. He blocked the sword by leaning over his ruler and hitting the other man's blade. Fince pulled Casidina out of the man's grip handing her off to another knight who had just jumped off of the boat. Fince continued to fight blocking the blade with his own. The man became enraged his eyes filling with an unseen fire at the thought of him losing to someone who happened to be much scrawnier than the big burly man. He brought his heavy sword up above his head preparing to swing down on Fince. The knight however was fast and strong injecting his own blade into the man's heart. Fince pulled his blade from the man and ran onto the boat getting there before the man had even hit the ground.

They set sail leaving behind in the wake of their trail the end of a civilization and Europe's first ever dark ages.



A STORY OF A CLOWN AND THE LACK OF A TITLE

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Let me begin at, well, the beginning.

My birth and childhood were not too different from the birth and childhood of the average child whose mother died post-labor and whose bereaved, angry father gave him away to be raised in a travelling circus. To people who have that origin, I am nothing special.

I was raised under a big top of Cirque de la Vie by a clown, a humorist by the name of Harry, or more commonly, Harry the Harlequin. An athletic man with the slapstick genius to raise the dead with the roaring laughter of his audience, but also a man with a heart of gold so true that he could sell it and end all poverty for all time. He treated me as his own, taught me all he could, and made the best pie in the world – to throw at my face. It was Harry who taught me to find my own way, by telling me to be a clown. It happened one night in Figueres after another one of his literally hit acts.

"M'boy, you've been watching from the sidelines too long. When do you plan on getting out there and doing your old man proud?" He asked me as he wiped sweat of his pronounced nose. The man was Jewish by nose, not by faith.

"I'll go out there when the accumulated forces of the universe grant me the skills to do what you do." I responded the only way I could, the only way a teenager could, with sass and smarts.

"Believe me, you've got the skills. The forces of the universe need to focus on granting you the cojones to show them off."

"My skills or my cojones?"

"Both, if that's what makes people laugh."

"What will make them laugh is how little skills I have and what a fool I'll make of myself."

"I'm sure something little of yours will make them laugh."

"Haha, very funny. Why don't you just go make a living off making people laugh?"

"I do, and it's great. You should try it, m'boy."

"I'll make a fool of myself."

"Good, you know what you have to do. Like I always say..."

"Make a fool of yourself, but with dignity." We said in unison with me mimicking his voice. I never quite understood the saying, but Harry integrated the words into my

vocabulary so deeply that it's next to impossible to forget.

"I'm giving you a week. Get your act ready, because you're going out there when we hit Barcelona." He said to me commandingly.

"I would, but I don't even have a stage name and I certainly don't have an act ready"

"What's wrong with your real name?"

"I don't have a real name, Harry. My father never gave me one and you refuse to give me one. Everyone's been calling me "kid" for the past fourteen years."

"I've been waiting for you to name yourself."

"You always say that when I ask."

"Well, you've got to come up with it now. Maybe not the act yet, we can work on that. The name, though. One week, aye?"

"Aye-aye." I never could come up with a name of my own; I'd never needed a reason to. I was fine with being called "kid", for nine years I actually thought that was my name. Suddenly, I had two weeks to come up with a name of my own. It would be name the world would know me by and that would resonate through the pages of history as the name of worst clown to even disgrace a painted smile.

I barely slept that night, more because it was cold enough to make a polar bear shiver rather than my anxiety towards going by a name that will be unfamiliar to everyone, especially to myself. On top of that, it was another one of those nights. One of those nights that brought me back to what I imagined was the hospital I was born in.

I found myself staring, confused and terrified by the fuzzy figures around me. They were terrified as well, clearly not because I was an abomination or the devil incarnate. They were terrified by the condition of my mother. The contractions of labor had brought too much stress to her weak heart. It was too much for her heart to handle – too much for her to stay alive.

She begged to see me, her son for whose first breath she had given her last. She looked at me for the first and last time. My meeting with my mother was an affair of beginnings and finalities. She kissed my tiny infantile body and with her last shred of strength said, "I love you, my angel." She died smiling.

Soon afterwards, my father began shouting. He cursed at the doctor for letting my mother die. He cursed God for taking her from him. He cursed me most of all, for killing my own mother. He cried and bawled and cursed until he was subdued. With my father quietly tranquilized on a bench, I was brought out of the Operating Room. I spent the night wondering what must have happened to make the world hate me so early in my life. I understood nothing.

My father took me home days after my birth, but only kept me for a week. Harry and his team, my current family, came to town that week and my father took me to their show for the sole purpose of leaving me there. He left me in a cardboard box with note that read, "Take the kid far away. My wife called him an angel; she's dead now. He's no angel of

mine."

I came to my senses in a cold sweat. I was sucked in by a nightmare, one I created for myself because no one could tell what happened that day. "It's all in your imagination." I told myself, trying to calm down. It really was all in my head. All of it. Except the note.

I reached for it. I always kept it in my left pants pocket as it was the only memento my father left to me. Sadly, that hateful note was the only connection I had to him, and to my mother. I read through the words as slowly as I did the very first time I read them twelve years ago.

Take the kid far away. My wife called him an angel; she's dead now. He's no angel of mine.

I read them again. Hoping my sheer stubbornness to keep reading the words would force them to change and show me some love my father couldn't feel for me.

Take the kid far away. My wife called him an angel; she's dead now. He's no angel of mine.

No dice.

Take the kid far away. My wife called him an angel; she's dead now. He's no angel of mine.

As stubbornly often as I read those words and as painful as it was every single time I did, I could not let that note go. Even if it was faded and mostly unreadable, I kept it close to me. Like a dagger I refused to take out of my chest.

I spent the rest of that night running through names, going from Amiel to Zachary, anything to keep my mind away from the note. I told myself to stop at and ponder every name that made sense to me. I went through the list without stopping. That morning at breakfast, it was clear that I was neither in good health nor in good spirits. Everyone had already finished when I arrived at the table where Catherine waited to let me eat.

Catherine was a woman with an astoundingly voluptuous figure, but no one dared objectify her – for good reason. Her skin was a sun-kissed caramel color, as one would expect from a woman who often travelled under the hot sun. The shape of her head resembled that of her body. Her face was round with full lips, a button nose and almond eyes, all framed by long black hair. I could only imagine the number of suitors she had in the past. Perhaps, I could ask Harry.

"Another one of those nights, huh?" Catherine asked me. She was a knife thrower, known for her skill to throw a knife through a grape on someone's head from clear across the other side of the tent, while blindfolded. Her skill with a knife extended to cooking to an extent that I was certain she would make an excellent chef should the cirque shut down.

"Aye," I replied groggily, "but you don't even need to ask, do you?" The previous night's stress only escalated as the day went on.

"True, but it's always polite to ask."

"You throw knives at people and you try to be polite?"

"I throw knives at people as my job. I don't live my work."

"What's for breakfast? Stressing myself out makes me hungry."

"Sunny-side-up eggs, sausages and baked potatoes."

"Great, I'll have some coffee with that." I picked up an empty mug and raised it at her. I was trying to lighten the mood despite my cheerless frame of mind.

"I'm a knife thrower, kid. I'm not a waitress."

"Perhaps that's for the best."

"Watch it, or I might just have to live my work." She took the mug from my hands and placed it on the table. She began humming a familiar melody as she filled the mug with the bittersweet, liquid energy I'd begun to need more mornings than not.

"Hey, Cath. Tell me, how am I supposed to name myself in two weeks' time?" I asked her that question instead of the one I actually wanted to ask her, which was the far more desperate "Will you please give me a name, please?"

"It's easy, kid. At least, I think it should be. I see a lot of kids wanting to change their names."

"Aye, but it's easy for them. They already have names, something to be dissatisfied with."

"What does dissatisfaction have to do with giving yourself a name?" She asked. She seemed intrigued less by my answer than the possibility of turning it against me.

I gathered what little with the past night's nightmare left me and distilled it into my answer. "The inspiration to make something only stems from the desire to replace something else, and the desire to replace something else comes from the dissatisfaction with that something."

She stopped and pondered my answer. Then, without missing a beat she retorted with, "Well, what did the cavemen want to replace with fire?"

"I'm not entirely sure, but if I could give a wild guess, fucking freezing would be my answer."

Catherine was not the type to tolerate cussing as she believed it was the epitome of crudeness. However, she let the vulgarity pass, taking it as a sign that I was irritated and that the bear should not be poked.

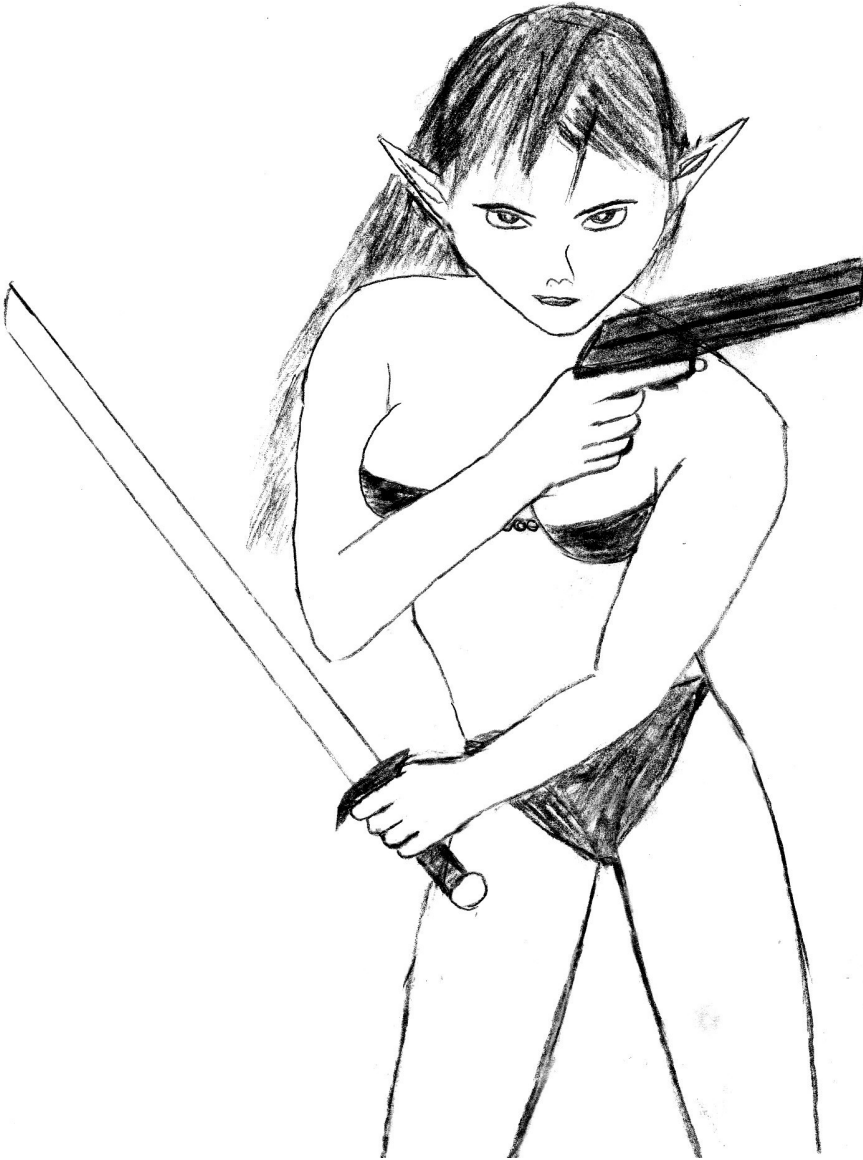
"Maybe," she said with a dash of agitation, "you should put your mind to work on giving yourself a name rather than sassing me."

"Aye, I'm sorry."

"You're forgiven. Here's your coffee." She handed me the mug filled with black coffee. I preferred my coffee that way. Coincidentally, nondairy creamer was decades away from existence at the time.

I scarfed down my breakfast in little more than three minutes. I always ate quickly after a night like the previous one. Stress eating. The coffee lasted longer as I took it outside the trailer and drank it as I helped clean things up.

FAN FICTION



Or: Leanna's Return

Brought to you courtesy of [Gunslinger](#)

ME2 HELLDIVER SAGA CHAPTER 12: FIRST ENCOUNTERS

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At the moment, they were up to date. They had all the people on the dossiers so far. Austin had a feeling though that something else was bound to turn up soon.

Without anything to do at the moment, Austin decided to see how well Grunt was settling in. Sure enough, he found the Krogan where he was usually.

“Shepard.” Said the Krogan as Austin entered.

“Just checking in. Making sure you’re acclimatizing.” Said Austin.

“The hold is to open. Not enough cover. Armour is limited. Warlord Granth would target here to scatter cargo, then focus on engines. That’s what tank imprints show about human ships, anyway. It’s how I learned from the tank – old pictures where memory is. Like holding a book for a child. Just “remember this,” picture after picture. No help with finding a reason to care.

“What other human info is floating around in there?” Austin asked.

“Less that finger deep to sever your spine. Humans are soft. Salarians, asari, all soft. Quarians, not so much. Helldivers also are tough to take down. Turians, you have to work the blade, I guess. Don’t see much point to it though. Heh, much point?” said Grunt.

“Ha! That’s a good one!” Austin laughed.

“Had a feeling you’d get that joke seeing as you use a sword. I’ve seen you sparing with that Asari.” said Grunt.

“What did Okeer want you to feel about this stuff?” Austin asked.

“Hate. But the pictures, the aliens in them, they don’t do anything. I see blood, craters. But so what? My guts were grown from a thousand more worthy. The dead were weak. If they were strong, I wouldn’t be needed. I don’t know why Okeer started teaching... When he turned on the tank the first time, I screamed. Weak, pitiful.” said Grunt.

“So you started small. But you became what you are. Not everyone gets that chance.” said Austin.

“I’m built for strength but didn’t earn it. I just am. Those dead were strong enough to try, even if they lost. The perfect Krogan. Ignoring what made me. No strength in that. I’ll take another look at what happened to the Krogan. Find a reason to care about it.” said Grunt.

As Austin proceeded into the CIC. Kelly got his attention.

“Major, the Arkane Council wish to speak to you in the debriefing room.” she said. Austin nodded and went to the comm room. The table disappeared into the floor and the holograms of the Council appeared before him.

“Shepard, we think we have them! Horizon -- one of our colonies in the Terminus Systems -- just went silent. If it isn’t under attack, it soon will be.” said Spartan.

“Have we heard anything from the Helldiver team stationed there?” Austin asked.

“Nothing. We’re going to have to assume the worst. Has Mordin delivered the countermeasure for the seeker swarms?” Tarnack asked.

“Not yet.” Austin replied.

“Let’s hope he works well under pressure.” said one of the unnamed Councillors.

“There’s something else you should know. One of your former crew, Ashley Williams is stationed on Horizon.”

“Last I knew, Ashley was still Alliance. Why would she visit a colony out in the Terminus systems?” Austin asked.

“Officially, it’s meant to be the Alliance’s attempt to improve relations with the colonies. But they’re up to something.” Said Tarnack.

“We’ll head straight there.” said Austin.

“This is most warning we’ve ever had, Shepard. Good luck.” said Spartan as the comm ended.

“Joker, set a course for Horizon. I’ve gotta go see the Professor.” said Austin.

“Aye aye, Major.” said Joker.

Austin found Mordin examining one of the seeker swarm drones. The bug flew around inside the case it had been placed in.

“Tell me you have something.” said Austin.

Mordin looked at the bug for a minute and then turned back to Austin.

“Yes.”

The Salarian walked up to his console and showed Austin the holographic plans that he had for the countermeasure.

Ashley Madeline Williams watched some of the children colonists playing a ball game in the fields. She couldn’t help but smile a bit as she saw the sight. Walking next to her was another one of the colonists on Horizon, Lilith.

“Lilith, we’ve got a problem.” she said.

“Still can’t calibrate the targeting matrix?” Lilith asked.

“Those defence towers are useless if we don’t figure it out.” said Ashley.

“Sorry, Chief. Getting our comm systems back online takes priority.” said Lilith.

“Yeah. Okay. Surprised people haven’t tried to blame that one on me too.” said Ashley coldly.

“People out here don’t trust the Alliance. It’s nothing personal.” said Lilith.

At that moment, several Helldivers turned up. They were the team stationed here to protect the colony.

“Lilith, why are communications down?” asked the leader.

“We’re not sure yet. We’re still trying to get them back up.” Lilith replied.

“Hope that’s soon. If the Arkane Council doesn’t hear from us for too long they’ll send people to investigate. We don’t like to raise false alarms. Especially when the Alliance is involved.” said another, looking coldly at Ashley.

Ashley was not happy with that.

“I...” she said.

But before she could, everyone suddenly looked to the sky. There was something in the clouds.

“What is that?” asked Lilith.

Ashley un-holstered her M-8 Avenger and looked through the guns scope. The clouds slowly cleared to reveal a massive ship made out of what looked like rock. Several swarms of bugs started to fly out of the ship and right at the colonists.

“Get everyone to a safe house.” said Ashley as the swarm got closer.

“Go! We’ll cover you!” one of the Helldivers yelled as they and Ashley opened fire. All the colonists ran for a shelter as the whole colony became surrounded by swarms of bugs and gunfire. Lilith tripped as she ran and Ashley stopped firing in order to help her up.

As she did, one of the bugs suddenly latched onto the Chief’s shoulder and bit her. Ashley groaned in pain as she pulled the seeker off of her. Just as she tried to move she suddenly froze all over and couldn’t move. She could only watch as the seeker swarms began doing the same to the other colonists. She saw Lilith disappear into the crowd.

Several minutes passed as things slowly got quieter and quieter. The swarms had found the colonists one by one. Then something new appeared. Ashley couldn’t move, but she could move her eyes. She saw a large humanoid figure walk within her field of vision. It was insect like in appearance. It had four eyes and carried a long insect like gun. A few other of these creatures soon followed. Hovering next to them were some strange kind of pods. Then suddenly, one of them started to act odd. A deep menacing voice rang through the air as it happened.

“Assuming control!” it said.

The Collector was then suddenly lifted into the air by an invisible force. Then it’s skin started to crack, emitting several lines of fire all over its body. The Collector then seemed to curl up as though it were ready to unleash something. Sure enough, it did and then landed back on its feet. All four of its eyes were now glowing very brightly.

The alien slowly walked up to the frozen Ashley who had been accidentally knocked over earlier.

“We are the Harbinger of their perfection. Prepare these humans for ascension!” said the lead Collector.

Ashley watched helplessly as another Collector picked up one of the frozen colonists and gently dragged him to a pod.

Austin didn’t want to take any chances on this mission, given that this would most likely be their first encounter with the Collectors. As a result he’d chosen to take all of Alpha Squad with him.

All of the Helldivers, except for Austin were seated in the Hellhound. The drop ship would just occasionally shake as it descended.

“Approaching drop off point. EDI, you picking up anything?” Austin asked into his comm.

“I detect no activity of any kind.” EDI replied as her holographic avatar appeared on the small holographic display that Alpha Squad were sat on either side of.

“Anything from the Helldivers? They have the latest in communication gear.” Alaara asked.

“Nothing. I do not detect any suit signatures either.” said EDI.

“It’s quite ironic isn’t it?” said Dash.

“What is?” Garrus asked.

“When we first came here, this colony was under attack by slavers. Now here we all here several years later and it’s under attack again.” said Dash.

“Sounds like there's a story behind that.” said Griffin, now interested in what many knew as Alpha Squad’s most intense and finest mission.

“Many years ago we came to this exact same colony world to stop Batarian slavers. They’d acquired some sort of massive ship that they were using to attack our outposts. We were unprepared for it though. They drove us from the planet and the colony was lost. After we defeated them though, colonists soon came back.” Leena explained.

“How’d you beat them?” Griffin asked.

“We tricked them into a black hole. We got them to chase us across the Terminus Systems and engaged them in an intense dog fight until we both ended up in the pull of an

unforeseen black hole.” said Austin.

“We just managed to escape to safe distance using our Mass Effect core. The Batarians however had damaged theirs and they were unable to do the same as us. We all watched as their ship was crushed by the black holes gravity.” said Ventra who was checking his snipe bow.

“That feels so long ago. And to think that it was what got us all the cross of glory.” Dash smiled he sat back in his seat slightly.

“Shame I didn’t join this team sooner.” Griffin grinned slightly.

“You’re not alone, Griffin. Liara and I are even new to this team than you are.” said Garrus.

“I’m sure you’ll prove yourselves too. This mission in particular is cross of glory worthy in my opinion.” said Austin.

“Still seems a bit unfair though. It makes me feel out of place here.” said Griffin.

“Don’t say that! You may have only been with us for a year but you’re no rookie. I made sure I only picked the best to join this team.” said Alaara.

Griffin’s mood brightened slightly and he smiled back at Alaara. “Thanks.” he said.

“Just be patient, Griffin. Many of the best rewards are not given to you, you earn them.” said Austin.

“I understand, Major.” said Griffin.

At that moment, the alarm sounded indicating that the drop ship was beginning final approach.

“Alright everyone, gear up! Look sharp.” said Austin as everyone stood up from their seats.

The ones that hadn’t had their helmets on picked them up and fastened them on. The doors slowly opened revealing Horizons bright sunlight and wide open fields.

“Okay, two at a time. Alaara, Sandra, you first!” said Austin.

The two Helldivers walked over to the edge of the dropship and jumped.

“Next two, Ventra and Leena!” said Austin.

The same procedure was repeated until only Austin and Liara were left. The two lovers nodded to one another and both jumped. Like all the others, as they landed they created small craters.

“All clear. We’ll radio when we’re ready for pick up.” Austin said to the Hellhound pilot through his communicator.

“Copy that, Major.” said the pilot as the drop ship flew off.

“We’re groundside. Mordin, you sure these armour upgrades will protect us from the seeker swarms?” Austin asked as he and Alpha Squad un-holstered their weapons.

“Certainty impossible. But in limited numbers, should confuse detection. Make us invisible to swarms... in theory.” came Mordin’s reply.

“In theory? That sounds promising.” said Garrus.

“Experimental technology. Only test is contact with seeker swarms. Look forward to seeing if you survive.” said Mordin.

“I’m gonna have a word with that Salarian after this.” said Kraan.

At that moment though, the social interaction was interrupted by the arrival of several Collector, each of them flying on insect like wings.

“Contact! Contact! Get to cover!” Austin yelled as the Collectors all shot laser beams at them.

All of Alpha Squad immediately dove for cover, some even returned fire. The Collectors were definitely smart fighters. Despite this though, they hadn’t counted on Alpha Squad’s teamwork and coordination. One Collector however snuck up behind Dash and knocked him down. Before the insect creature could do anything though, Griffin impaled it on the large blade attached to his minigun. With the Collector dead, Griffin helped Dash up.

“Thanks. I’m gonna have to owe you that beer.” said Dash.

“You already owe like five.” said Griffin.

As Alpha Squad proceeded further through the colony they could see the massive Collector ship in the distance. Its sight was familiar to Austin. In fact it looked like the ship that had attacked the original Normandy two years ago.

“Major, we’re getting all interference! Can’t maintain a signal!” they were just able to make out of Joker’s voice as the comm went static.

“The Collectors are disrupting communication.” said Sandra as she tried to clear up the signal.

“We’re on our own now.” said Austin.

At that very moment, more Collectors appeared, this time though they weren’t alone. Several human like figures were with them. They moved and looked like zombies. Well, cybernetic zombies to be more precise.

Several of them lunged at the Helldivers, but like normal zombies they were pretty easy to kill once their heads were shot off. The rest of the Collectors quickly shared this. One husk however managed to jump onto Austin; the Major however retaliated by grabbing it by the neck, throwing it to the floor and smashing his armoured foot down on its head.

“Those things looked like the Husks the Geth used on Eden Prime.” he said as he got his breath back.

“I thought the Geth got that technology from Sovereign.” said Leena.

“Guess we’ve been right all along. The Collectors answer to the Reapers.” said Alaara.

Alpha Squad carefully made their way around a corner and found themselves staring at a still intact Husk body.

“Looks human. Think it’s one of the colonists?” asked Griffin.

“No. The Geth impaled their victims on giant spikes to turn them into Husks. But we haven’t seen any.” said Liara.

“The Collectors must have already had the Husks. Said Garrus.

Austin knelt down in front of the Husks and scanned it with his omni tool.

“These aren’t the same creatures I fought on Eden Prime. These Husks are more advanced, evolved.” he said.

“They still die like the others did!” said Kraan.

“The Collectors aren’t getting away with more victims! Let’s move out!” said Austin.

They quickly left the shelter they’d been in earlier. As they rounded the corner they found themselves staring at several pods. Still there were no colonists to be found.

“Everyone’s gone, just like before.” said Garrus.

“What the hell?” said Griffin as he examined one of the pods.

“Don’t touch them!” Austin ordered.

Griffin did as he was told and stepped away from the pod. He could swear though that there was something inside it, something moving.

This thought however was interrupted by the arrival of more Collectors. This time though, something unexpected happened. One of the Collectors started to pulse violently and its skin cracked open in multiple places. The creature was then lifted into the air by an unseen force.

“I am assuming direct control!”

Bellowed a deep voice. The Collector then unleashed an orange shockwave of energy and landed back on its feet. Its four eyes were now glowing and small bits of fire were seeping from the hundreds of cracks in the Collectors skin.

Alpha Squad quickly went to cover as the Collectors fired on them. Even this new Collector was throwing biotics at them.

“We are the Harbinger of your genetic destiny!” boomed the Collector. “You will know pain, Shepard!”

“How does that Collector know your name?!” Liara yelled over all the noise.

“I don’t know, but it’s certainly not in a friendly way!” said Austin as he returned fire.

“You will know pain, Shepard!” Harbinger yelled as he threw a massive singularity at Austin.

Alaara however was quick to throw her own at Harbinger's attack and both singularities disintegrate before they could cause any damage.

Harbinger however was ready with more attacks and started hurling dark biotics all over the place.

"These things are really starting to piss me off now!" Ventra swore.

The Turian quickly loaded a round into his sniper rifle, sighted along the scope and let the string loose. The round hit its target and half of Harbinger's eyes were blinded as the round went right through and even killed another Collector.

Griffin then took this as an opening and unloaded his entire mini gun right into all the Collectors and lastly Harbinger who was still trying to see through his blindness.

"Releasing control!" it said.

Harbinger left the Collector body just as the rounds tore it to pieces.

"Remind me to never piss you off, Griffin." said Ventra as everyone recovered.

Just as they had all regained their breath though, the HUDs in their suits detected motion in the next building.

"Go in quietly. If it's one of the colonists, we don't want to scare them." said Austin as they all readied for entry.

The door opened and Kraan and Griffin went in first to make sure it was clear. Leena and Ventra soon followed and then everyone else. Just as the door closed however, there was a clanging sound and a paint can rolled out from behind some crates.

"Come out where we can see you!" said Austin.

Very slowly, a woman came out from behind the crates. She had a pistol in her hand. For a moment, the two sides had their guns pointed at each other. The woman seemed to hesitate though when she saw them more clearly.

"It's... it's you!" she said surprisingly. The woman put the gun away. She looked very happy to see them. Austin couldn't deny though that there was something familiar about her.

"Have we met?" Austin asked as he and Alpha Squad lowered their weapons.

"I don't suppose you'd remember. You and your squad rescued me and my friends two years ago on the planet Maltoor.

Now Austin remembered where she'd seen this woman before.

"Lilith? Well, this is a surprise." said Austin.

"It's okay, Delan! They're on our side." said Lilith.

Another colonist appeared from behind a nearby crate. He looked like a mechanic.

"Helldivers! Boy, am I glad to see you. We thought those things got you." he said.

“We’re not the same Helldiver team that was stationed here. We’re here to investigate the attack. Stop the Collectors from abducting humans.” Austin explained.

“Those things are Collectors? You mean they’re real?” said Lilith, rather shocked at this bit of news.

“I thought they were just made up. You know -- propaganda to keep us in Alliance space. No! They got damn near everyone!” said Delan.

“What exactly happened? The slightest detail may be important.” Austin asked.

“I came down to check on the main grid after we lost our comm signals. Then I heard screaming.” said Delan.

“That massive ship then suddenly appeared out of the clouds. The Helldiver team covered us while we ran. I owe them for that.” said Lilith.

“When I looked outside and there were these... swarms of bugs. Everyone they touched just froze. Just as I was about to seal the door, Lilith managed to get in. We had no choice but to seal the doors.” said Delan.

“I wish we could’ve done more.” said Lilith sadly. “It’s just like last time.”

“It’s not your fault. The Collectors have very advanced technology, it’s no surprise that you were all caught off guard.” said Austin.

“Damn it -- it’s the Alliance’s fault! They stationed that Chief Williams here and built those defence towers. It made us a target. The Helldivers were doing just fine without them.” said Delan.

“If you have defence towers we can use them against the Collector ship!” said Ventra.

“You’d need to calibrate the targeting system first. It’s never worked right.” said Delan.

“Either me or EDI should be able to figure it out. We just need the location.” said Leena.

“Head for the main transmitter on the other side of the colony. Pretty hard to miss. The targeting controls are at the base.” Said Lilith.

“It’s probably better if you two stay here. The seeker swarms can’t see us, but they might see you. We don’t want to lose any more people.” said Austin.

“Yeah, that’s what I was thing too. Plus, Lilith may have a gun, but she’s no soldier.” said Delan. “I’ll let you out, but we’re locking the door behind you. I’m not taking any chances. Good luck. I think you’re gonna need it.

“Good luck, Commander. It was good to see you again.” Lilith smiled.

“Major now actually. I haven’t been a Commander for two years now.” Austin corrected.

Still there was no sign of any more colonists. This was a bad sign. It obviously meant the Collectors were finishing up here. They could see more Collectors around the corners. At the moment, they were unaware of the Helldivers presence.

“Call your targets. We’ll take ‘em all at once.” said Austin as he lined his sight up with one of the Collectors.

Alpha Squad did the same and lined up their weapon sights with their targets.

“Targets marked. 3... 2... 1... Fire!”

All Helldivers fired simultaneously and most of the Collectors fell. The Husks that had been with them roared and started running towards their enemies. The other Collectors fired on the Helldivers as Harbinger once again possessed one of them. It was nothing Alpha Squad couldn’t handle, but it seemed once again that the Collectors had another surprise for them. Bringing up the rear of the attack was a different type of Husk. It was twice as large as a normal husk and had way more mass. Its right arm was replaced with a massive plasma cannon and its entire left shoulder was one massive storage of blue plasma.

The Scion, as it was called took aim at Alpha Squad and fired. The plasma caused a massive explosion which sent some of them flying. As it fired another however, Alaara threw up a huge biotic shield to shield them from it.

Harbinger however noticed this and threw a massive barrage of biotics at the Shield, causing Alaara to falter slightly. Austin fired a few shots from inside the shield as he tried to help Alaara up.

What happened next though took everyone by surprise. Sandra suddenly uncloaked behind Harbinger and grabbed him by the neck.

“No one tires out my wife, but me!” she yelled as she started punching Harbinger in the face really hard. Harbinger struggled violently to free himself, but Sandra refused to let go.

The Helldiver even took out her combat knife and stabbed Harbinger several times.

The Scion meanwhile had once again focused its attention on Austin and the others and fired another shot. Just before Alaara’s shield could give out though, Liara threw up her own just in time. Hers was the same size but it seemed to be twice as strong. Alaara relaxed and allowed herself to recover briefly before she then went on the attack and threw a singularity at the Scion. The small black hole didn’t lift the husks off its feet but it did seem to tear a few patches of skin off.

All the while, no one had noticed that Griffin had cloaked out of sight and was sneaking up behind the Scion. Just as the husk noticed him uncloak right behind it, the Helldiver impaled it on his minigun’s blade many times. It took several stabs but eventually the Scion drew its last breath.

With that and the rest of the Collectors dealt with, Sandra finished dealing with Harbinger as the two wrestled with one another violently. As Harbinger was just starting to loosen Sandra’s grip around his neck, Sandra took a small blue vial from her belt. With enough force to punch through a wall, Sandra smashed the vial into one of Harbinger’s eyes and the fluid released.

“I will find you again!” Harbinger bellowed as he released control of the body again, leaving the Collector to be eaten alive by the liquid.

“Remind me to repay you deeply for that later, darling.” Alaara smiled seductively at Sandra.

“Would’ve thought we’d see more of the colonists by now.” said Kraan as he made sure all the enemies were definitely dead.

“They’ve probably been loaded onto the Collector Ship by now. We should hurry.” said Garrus.

Alpha Squad quickly made their way to where the main transmitter tower for the anti-ship guns was located. Leena walked up to the nearby control panel and took off one of the plates.

“Right, keep me covered, guys. Time for me to do what I do best!” said the Quarian as she cracked her fingers back and began her work on the wires and the targeting system.

After a few minutes, Leena had managed to get the system online and had erased what bugs and errors she’d been able to. EDI would need to handle the rest since some of the errors and bugs were far too complex for even Leena to handle.

“Okay, I’ve done all I can. Time to let EDI take over.” she said.

“Normandy, do you copy?” said Austin into his wrist communicator.

“Joker here. Signal’s weak, Major, but we got you.” came Joker’s reply.

“I think these uninvited guests have overstayed their welcome long enough. EDI, bring the defence towers online!” said Austin.

“Errors in the calibration software are easily rectified, but it will take a few minutes to bring the towers to full power. I recommend a defensive posture. I will not be able to mask the increased generator output.” said EDI.

“This is beginning to sound like something you’d do in a video game.” said Dash.

“Don’t start that again.” said Ventra.

At that moment though, the banter was interrupted by the arrival of another new enemy.

Once again, it was another unwelcome surprise. This time though it looked more the sort of stuff out of a nightmare. The thing was some sort of massive spider creature. Unlike a normal spider though it only had four legs rather than eight. Like a Collector it had a triangular and insect like head with four eyes. What was the most intimidating feature about this... Praetorian though was that it’s open mouth was filled with Husk skulls. The Praetorian flew gracefully into the area and landed hard, creating a biotic shock wave as it landed.

“Great. This just keeps getting better and better.” said Alaara sarcastically as the Praetorian slowly edged towards them.

“We need a little help here, EDI!” said Austin.

Alpha Squad assumed defence positions as the Praetorian lifted back up into the air. It’s four blue eyes started to glow brightly. Just as everyone noticed this it suddenly shot a massive blue beam of energy out of them. Sandra just managed to avoid the beam, but it still damaged her shields slightly as it scraped her.

“You should not have done that!” said Alaara coldly as she fired on the attacker. It didn’t do much, but it did seem to cause a bit of damage.

Seeing that the Praetorian could be weakened, the rest of Alpha Squad fired on it as well. Angered by the irritation, the Praetorian went for another attack and suddenly slammed itself down on the ground with tremendous force. Not only did this create another shock wave but the Praetorian also unleashed several more as it screamed.

“Get back! Get back! Don't get too close!” Austin shouted as he managed to pull Dash out of the Praetorians attack range. “Right, you can mess with me, but you do not mess with my friends!” he said coldly as he set his Revenant to fully automatic.

Rolling out of cover, Austin let the machine gun loose and the Praetorian was bombarded by round after round. Despite that this caused plenty of damage it didn’t hurt the Praetorian enough for it to cease its attacks. The creature’s eyes once again went bright and it shot a beam from its eyes. Austin however had enough time to dodge it and rolled back behind a nearby crate.

“EDI! We need those guns online, now!” Austin yelled into his comm as Griffin distracted the Praetorian with his minigun.

“Target anti-ship batteries at 100%. I have control.” said EDI. “Firing at Collector vessel!”

In the distance, the anti-ship guns started firing at the Collector vessel overhead. All the while the Praetorian continued firing and screaming at the Helldivers.

“We’re wearing down its armour! Keep it up!” said Alaara.

The rest of Alpha Squad, Griffin especially, unloaded all they could right into the Praetorian. The machine screeched and seemed to clutch its head as it slowly disintegrated itself from all the damage.

In the distance, the Collector vessel was really taking a pounding now. The bottom of the ship readjusted itself and its main engine fired, causing the whole colony to shake.

“They’re pulling out!” said EDI.

Two more shots were fired before the vessel took off and blasted into space.

“And stay out!” Dash yelled triumphantly.

Delan and Lilith came out from where they’d been hiding. Delan watched helplessly as the ship vanished from orbit.

“No! Don't let ‘em get away!” said Delan desperately.

“There’s nothing we can do. They’re gone!” said Austin, trying his best to sound reassuring.

“Half the colonies in there! Do something!” Delan repeated.

“They did all they could, Delan! If it wasn’t for Shepard we’d be in that ship too!” Lilith said defensively.

“Shepard? Wait, I know that name. Sure, I remember you. You’re some type of big Alliance hero.” said Delan.

At that moment, a very familiar face came out from behind one of the crates. It was Ashley.

“Captain Austin Shepard. Captain of the Normandy, the first human Spectre, the hero of Elysium, saviour of the Citadel.” she smiled at her old childhood friend. She then turned towards Delan. “You’re in the presence of a god, Delan, and a ghost.”

“All the good people we lost and you get left behind. Figures. Screw this! I’m done with you Alliance types.” said Delan as he walked off and left the area.

Lilith could see where the conversation between Austin and Ashley would be going, so she decided to give them some space.

“I’ll check on the other colonists.” she said.

Lilith left and Ashley slowly walked up to Austin. The two looked at each other for long time before Ashley finally gave in and hugged him tightly. Austin didn’t resist and hugged her back. He couldn’t believe it was really her. He’d missed his old friend a lot.

“I thought you were dead, Shepard. We all did.” said Ashley, sounding near the point of tears.

“I’m glad to see you too, old friend.” Austin smiled as he retracted his helmet. “How’ve you been?” he asked.

“I’ve been well, thanks. First things first though. You owe me an explanation. I spent the past two years believing you were dead. You’ve been one of my oldest friends, Austin and I would’ve followed you anywhere. Why didn’t you try to contact me? Why didn’t you let me know that you were alive?” Ashley asked.

“It wasn’t my choice, Ash. I actually was dead. I spent two years dead while my suit slowly brought me back to life.” Austin explained.

“You’re suit brought you back to life? That’s the best excuse you can come up with? You expect me to believe that?” said Ashley crossly.

“That’s the truth, Ash. I swear to you.” said Austin.

“He shouldn’t have to explain himself. To you least of all, Ashley.” said Liara defensively.

“Liara? You’re a Helldiver?” Ashley asked surprised.

“It’s a long story.” said Garrus.

“So what about all these reports about you and Cerberus? Care to explain those as well?” Ashley asked.

“You believe those reports as well?” Alaara asked, crossly.

“Alliance intel said Cerberus could be behind our missing colonies. We got a tip that this would be the next to get hit. I went to Anderson, but he wouldn’t talk. But there were rumours that you weren’t dead, worse, that you were working for the enemy.” said Ashley.

“Ashley, listen to me. Those reports about me and Cerberus are false. They let slip all these rumours to try and turn everyone against me.” said Austin. “Plus, would the rest of my squad work with me if I was with Cerberus?”

“He’s right. We’d rather die than work with those terrorists, regardless of whether Shepard was with them or not.” said Alaara defensively.

“So you’re still with the Helldivers?” Ashley asked, starting to sound persuaded.

“Yes. When I escaped the Cerberus facility I was on I went straight back to Arkadia. I’d never work for Cerberus, regardless of the situation.” said Austin.

“But if that’s true, why didn’t you try to contact me? Let me know that you’d come back. You’re file still lists you as killed in action and you’re Alliance rank hasn’t been reinstated either.” Ashley asked.

“This mission required a lot of secrecy. We couldn’t afford for the Collectors to know that we were on to them. We had to keep a low profile.” Liara explained.

“Trust me, Ash. I wanted to contact you. Letting you know that I was alive was one of my first concerns but we couldn’t risk tipping the Collectors off. I’d have let you know if I could. I can only tell you that I am so sorry.” said Austin.

Ashley still didn’t look happy, but it did sound as though she had been convinced now. Her mood seemed to brighten.

“So now that the Collectors know about you, what’ll you do now?” she asked.

“Now, we wait until they make their next move. Since the undercover work is no longer required though, I think I may also get my identity reinstated. I think I’m ready to come out of hiding now and let the galaxy know that I’m back.” said Austin.

“What about the Reapers though? Aren’t they more of a threat?” Ashley asked.

“We have firm reason to believe that the Collectors are working for the Reapers. Don’t worry, i intend to finish what we started two years ago.” said Austin.

“I’m glad to hear it.” said Ashley. Her anger looked as though it had gone now. After all, she could never truly stay mad at Austin.

“Tell me honestly though, Ash. Why are you here? I don’t really buy the whole story of you trying to improve relations with the Alliance.” Austin asked.

“I was... investigating you.” Ashley admitted.

“What? I thought you were his friend! Besides, Anderson knows the truth as well. Why would he approve of this?” said Alaara.

“I was given this mission long before news reached us that you were alive. We didn’t know about you at the time. Plus Anderson wanted to be sure that Cerberus wasn’t behind the colony attacks. It’s not that he doesn’t trust you, but he had to know the truth.” said Ashley.

“I think I need to have a word with him about his later.” said Austin. He then turned back to Ashley. “So what will you do now? If you don’t have another mission after this we’d be glad to have you on the Normandy. It’d be just like old times.”

“I wish I could, Austin. I really do, but I can’t. I have another assignment that I can’t ignore.” said Ashley regrettably.

“I understand. Do you want a ride back to the Citadel at least?” Austin offered.

“That... that sounds wonderful. Thanks, Austin.” Ashley smiled.

Before the conversation could continue further though, there was a sudden loud boom and the whole place briefly shook.

“What’s that?” Griffin asked as he pointed to something in the sky. It was leaving a crowd trail behind. As all of Alpha Squad looked up however, only too late though did they realise what it was.

“Missiles! Get clear!” Austin yelled.

Alpha Squad and Ashley didn’t need to be told twice and they ran as fast as they could. Despite managing to clear of the impact area though, they weren’t out of range of the incoming explosion though. The whole yard exploded as the two missiles impacted on the ground. Dirt, rocks and rubble were thrown everywhere and everyone was sent flying. Ashley could only briefly see Griffin trying to shield her from the explosion before it sent him flying and a hard rock collided with her head. Everything went black.

Ashley groaned as she slowly regained consciousness. Her head hurt like hell, she could see a bit of blood trickling from her forehead, her chest felt like it had been crushed, one of her ankles had been twisted and her right arm was pinned rather painfully under some debris. The marine winced in pain as she felt it all at once.

Then she started to hear something. As her hearing slowly came back she could hear voices. They were muffled at first but they slowly started getting clearer. Then she started seeing a silhouette through all the dust and smoke of the explosion. It was humanoid and female in appearance, but it looked like it was clad in some sort of armour. It also had something sticking out from its right hip and its right hand looked odd, almost... machine like.

“They have to be here somewhere. Those missiles weren’t designed to kill, but even a Helldiver will take time to recover from that.” it said.

As Ashley’s vision slowly got better, a few more silhouettes appeared. One was another

female, and the other a male. Guessing that they might not be friendly, Ashley tried to get herself free from the rubble but her arm was pinned very hard by the debris and her twisted ankle didn't help either. She couldn't see Austin or any of the other Helldivers either. This was very problematic.

"Spread out. Search the area! I want them found!" said Shadow as her eyes, or eye and cybernetic eye scanned the area.

Thanks to the data from the Illusive Man, she and the others had been tipped off that this colony would be the next to get hit, not only that, but Ashley Williams would be here too. This was the perfect opportunity for them to strike. With Ashley as a hostage, they could draw Shepard right to her and then she would be able to have her much wanted revenge. However, taking Williams hostage probably wouldn't be necessary since Shepard was actually here somewhere in the wreckage.

Miranda, who was stood near Shadow separated from the group. Wilson went to go with her but Shadow motioned for him to stay with her.

"Wait, she's here! I can sense her." said the Phantom coldly.

Upon hearing this, Ashley remained absolutely still. Despite that her heart was pounding inside her chest, she did her best to keep her breathing under control. The silhouette of Shadow edged closer and for a moment, she felt she was done for. Some of the dust and smoke slowly cleared and she was able to see Shadow a bit more clearly. Only now could she see the Cerberus logo and the Phantom's arm and also on the arm of Wilson. At that, all thoughts of Austin being with Cerberus vanished. Why work with a Helldiver just to screw them over now?

Shadow was now really close now. So close in fact now that she could hear the Phantom breathing inside her armour. Her fright began to increase even more when she saw Shadow's cybernetic hand and her sword. The hand flexed several times, clearly ready to punch through a ribcage and tear a heart out. Ashley hadn't seen many things that scared her that much, but Shadow definitely went on top of that list.

The Phantom took another step closer to Ashley and then seemed to look right at her. For a moment, Ashley saw the blue glint from Shadow's cybernetic eye which was causing the eye optics on the right side of her mask to glow blue rather than the usual red.

Luckily for her though, the Phantom then changed direction and walked off. Breathing a sigh of she groaned quietly as she used all her strength to push off the debris that had her arm pinned. She suppressed a scream as it was finally freed. From the feel of things, the combination of the explosion and the debris had dislocated it. Her wrist didn't feel right either and had probably been twisted as well.

Very slowly Ashley kicked away some of the heavy rubble that was covering her legs and feet and slowly pushed herself up using her functional left arm. Now able to see clearly she looked around. There was no sign of anyone else, or any traces that a Helldiver had been buried here. Worry started to cloud her thoughts. Was Austin still alive? Had the

blast killed any of his squad?

Right at that moment however, her thoughts were interrupted as something hard and metallic latched onto her neck and gripped tightly. Ashley looked immediately at the source of the attack... straight into the piercing optic eyes of Shadow. The Phantom had found her. Ashley tried desperately to loosen the cyborg's grip but the hand was just too strong.

"Well well well... what have we here?" Shadow grinned evilly as she slowly hoisted the Gunnery Chief up by her neck. "Found her. She's a tough little girl."

More of the dust and smoke cleared and Miranda, Wilson and a few other Cerberus troopers, along with several combat mechs appeared.

"This her?" asked Wilson.

"Oh, it's her alright. I'd know this bitch anywhere." said Shadow. The Phantom turned back to Ashley who was still struggling against Shadow's cybernetic grip. "Now... what are we going to do with you, my dear?"

Austin groaned as he regained consciousness. The explosion from the missiles had sent him and the others flying while Ashley had become separated. He had seen her get hit by a rock, but after that everything had gone black. It was times like these that he was really thankful that Dell had taken some of his personal feedback into account and had made some upgrades to the lockdown mode on the Helldiver armour so that they now activated immediately upon the user passing out rather than waiting a few seconds.

Austin's HUD lit up and came back on as the suit scanned all his systems and armour for damage. After a quick few seconds, the lockdown deactivated he found he could move again. As he sat up, he could hear voice in his comm. It was a bit distorted, but it slowly cleared itself up.

"Alpha Squad, do you copy?! Shepard!" came EDI'S voice.

"Damn it, Major, talk to us!" Joker continued.

"I'm okay, Joker." Austin groaned.

Noticing that his visual feed was rather distorted, Austin gave his helmet a small punch and the feed managed to return to normal. He then quickly set his omni tool to scan for the others. Several holographic silhouettes showed up beneath the rubble. The first one he noticed was only partially buried, it was Liara.

"Are you alright, Shepard? There was a massive explosion down there and we lost contact with you." EDI asked.

"Some sort of missile. Knocked us out, but everyone looks okay." Austin replied as he quickly kicked away the rest of the debris and slowly lifted a huge plate off of his lover. The Asari's own lockdown deactivated and she started moving. Austin gently helped her up and gave her a small hug.

“Are you alright?” he asked concernedly. Liara’s exterior didn’t look damaged at all, but he never took any risks when it came to her.

“I’m alright, Austin. Just a bit shook up.” Liara replied.

“You sure?” Austin asked.

Liara nodded and that was enough to convince Austin.

“Alright, help the others.” he said.

The two separated and Austin went over to help Ventra out of the rubble. Liara meanwhile started digging Leena out. Slightly further away, Alaara had also woken up and was helping Sandra up.

“Is everyone okay?” she asked as she and her wife re-joined the squad.

“I think so. What the hell was that?” said Dash as he struggled to get himself out of a large amount of rocks that he’d become trapped in. “Errrr, can someone get me out of here?”

“Got it.” said Kraan, grunting as he used all his strength to move away some of the heavier rocks. Dash managed to do the rest himself.

“Where’s Griffin?” asked Garrus as he looked around.

Right as the Turian had spoken Griffin’s name, a Helldiver arm punched out of some of the rubble right next to where Garrus was standing.

“I’m alright. Wow! I’ve heard of going out with a big bang, but that was way too explosive.” he said as he climbed out and picked his minigun back up.

“You sure that wasn’t you?” Ventra joked slightly as Austin helped him up and handed him his sniper bow.

“Missiles aren’t explosives, my friend.” Griffin replied.

At that moment, Austin suddenly heard something. It sounded like choking. Austin activated his magnetic view to see through the dust. What he saw, caused to stand back in shock slightly.

There was a small army of Cerberus agents gathered around another body. He guessed that was Ashley. Even through the magnetic view, he recognized the leader immediately. It was one of his oldest and most dreaded adversaries, Shadow.

“It can’t be.” he said.

“What? What is it?” said Alaara.

“Keep your voices down and switch to magnetics.” Austin whispered as he crouched down and activated his cloak.

Alpha Squad activated their magnetic views first. Upon seeing that they weren’t alone here they quickly followed Austin’s example by crouching down and also cloaking.

“What are we gonna do? They’ve got Ashley.” said Griffin.

"I've got a plan. It's risky, but we don't have much choice. Listen carefully." said Austin as he started going over the plan for rescuing his friend.

Ashley still continued to struggle as Shadow's cybernetic grip contracted around her windpipe. Still the Phantom glared at her through her mask.

"What do we do with her now?" Miranda asked.

"Now we simply wait for Shepard to come to us." said Shadow.

"In the meantime though, there's nothing saying that we can't have a little fun with this Alliance marine." said Wilson.

"I was thinking similarly." Shadow grinned evilly as Shadow unsheathed her sword and readied it to cut away some of Ashley's armour.

The Phantom hated the Alliance as much as she hated the Helldivers as well. That was why she joined Cerberus. Plus, she was bisexual so she had no objections to watching some of the others teach the Alliance marine a lesson. Just as the Phantom's blade started cutting however, a voice sounded behind them.

"Put her down, Shadow!"

Everyone instantly whirled around to see Austin standing on a nearby hill that had been caused by the debris. Only his plasma cannon was trained on them.

So... the great Major Shepard, at last!" Shadow said coldly as she used her left arm to sheath her sword and unclip her pistol which she then pointed at Ashley's head.

"I said put her down! I won't tell you again!" Austin demanded as the targeting laser for his plasma cannon pointed at Shadow's face.

"You're in no position to give orders, Shepard!" Shadow shouted as she now moved Ashley in front of her and pointed the gun right at her head. The other Cerberus soldiers and the mechs all pointed their guns at Austin. "Power down your suit now or this little bitch will be joining her pathetic grandfather in hell!"

At the mention of Shadow calling her grandfather pathetic, Ashley started struggling violently. Despite her best efforts though she was too weak from the missiles and the cyborg was too strong.

Austin reluctantly accepted. He disengaged his weapon systems and then deactivated his armour all together.

Austin slowly dropped down to his knees and the mechs surrounded him.

"Put this on him." said Shadow as she handed a small device to Miranda.

Miranda did as she was told and walked up to Austin. The Helldiver looked at her for a very brief moment before she placed the device on his chest and it activated.

"What's that for anyway?" Miranda asked.

"That'll prevent him from turning his armour back on without us knowing." Shadow

replied as she lowered her guard and her gun now pointed away from Ashley. She then smiled evilly at Austin. "I'd take a good look at her face if I were, Shepard. It's a fitting last sight for a doomed soul." she said as she now pointed the gun right at Austin helmet.

Austin couldn't help but panic slightly. He hadn't planned on this. Even without his shields and with all his suits systems turned off the bullet wouldn't do any damage, but at point blank range there was a heavy risk that it would shoot through his helmet. The armour was strong, but not that strong.

"So, what revenge is it this time? This is quite far just to get revenge for a lost arm." said Austin.

"How blind you are, Shepard. Have you forgotten the Cerberus soldier you killed on the Lazarus station? One of them was my brother!" said Shadow angrily.

"I do hate it when these things get personal." said Austin, doing his best to keep his cool.

"Always the modest one, even in the face of certain death. I'd give it up if I were you. Face it, Shepard. You've lost." said Shadow.

The Phantom however had been so preoccupied with Shepard however that she hadn't noticed Wilson walking up behind her with gun in one hand and a small EMP device in the other.

"Actually... you all have!" he said.

Before Shadow could react in time, Wilson placed the detonator on Shadow's cybernetic arm and it detonated.

Shadow screamed in pain as all her arm's motor functions were disabled. Her cyborg fingers sprang open and Ashley fell to the ground. Shadow also fell to her knees, clutching her now disabled arm in sheer pain.

"Wilson, what the hell..." said Miranda as she reached for her SMG. But Wilson already had his down gun pointed right at her head.

"Don't try it, Miranda! That includes you too!" he shouted to Miranda and the other Cerberus soldiers. The mechs simply remained where they were since Wilson had secretly hacked them, just as he had back on the Lazarus station when Austin had escaped. "Now if you'll relieve yourself of your firearms." he said.

The Cerberus soldiers did as they had been told and so did Miranda.

"You backstabbing..." Shadow swore between gritted teeth.

Despite being disabled, the arm was still causing her extreme amounts of pain. Too much pain for her to fight back or get up.

"Well I learned from the best, Azula." said Wilson as he took Miranda's SMG from her and threw it out of her reach.

"So it was you. You were the one who hacked the mechs on the Lazarus station!" said Miranda coldly as she stood back slightly.

“Shepard’s escape was not part of the plan but it did serve as a fitting distraction.” said Wilson.

“But why, Wilson? Who bought you off?” Miranda asked.

“I wasn’t bought off. I never had any love for Cerberus anyway. I’ve worked for the Shadow Broker for a very long time.” said Wilson. “Shepard’s body originally belonged to the Shadow Broker, and he wants his property back.”

“Wilson, you can’t trust the Shadow Broker. He worked for the Collectors.” said Miranda.

Unknown to anyone, Shadow had secretly powered her arm back up and had removed the small EMP device. True the EMP had disabled her arm’s systems, but the Phantom was very smart. Her cyborg arm’s main systems weren’t EMP resistant... but her backup systems were. Her arm quietly powered back up and she readied for sneak attack on Wilson.

“Oh, enough of this, Miranda! Nothing more tires than last minute heroics!” said Wilson.

Shadow seized her chance and lunged at Wilson. The two wrestled with one another violently as Shadow’s cyborg arm punched Wilson hard in the face causing blood to spurt from his mouth. Miranda also tried to attack but Wilson noticed this. He managed to free his gun arm from Shadow’s grip and smashed her in her in the face with it, knocking her to the ground.

With Miranda temporarily knocked out, Wilson’s attention went back to Shadow. Seeing an opening, he kicked the Phantom hard in the stomach, causing her to loosen her grip on his arms. Just as he recovered though, Shadow disappeared completely from view as she activated her own cloaking device.

The other Cerberus soldiers moved to pick up their weapons but Wilson saw this and fired a warning shot at them. He then went back to looking for Shadow.

“Ah, hide and seek is it? Or should we play, search and destroy?” he said challengingly.

Miranda, who had recovered from her head blow, noticed Shadow hiding behind a crate just out of Wilson’s view. She decided to at least try and help the Phantom. Perhaps her attitude towards her would improve.

“Wilson!” she yelled.

Wilson whirled around to face her. Sure enough, Shadow uncloaked right behind him and grabbed his right wrist with her cyborg hand. Before Wilson could react in time, Shadow gave his wrist a violent twist, snapping the bones and causing the gun to fall free. Shadow then performed a very fast move, twisting Wilson’s arm around as she did so. Using her left hand, she unsheathed her sword from her right hip. Wilson only had a few seconds to realise this before Shadow thrust the blade right through his heart and twisted it violently several times to cause as much pain as possible.

“No one betrays me, Wilson. Nobody! ” Shadow snarled.

Wilson only looked helplessly at the blade sticking out of his heart for a few seconds before all life left him and he went limp.

“Get off my sword!” said Shadow as she carelessly pushed Wilson’s dead body off her blade.

“Good moves, Azula.” said Miranda as Shadow rather surprisingly helped her up.

“Smart move with the distraction, Lawson. Gave me a perfect opening at that bastard.” said Shadow as she put her sword back in its holster. The rest of the Cerberus soldiers picked up their guns and relaxed.

“Now, were we?” said Shadow as she picked up her dropped pistol. “Ah yes, you.”

During the whole commotion, Ashley had tried to crawl to safety, but with dislocated arm, and a twisted ankle, she hadn’t got far. She froze as Shadow pointed the gun at her.

“Killing her wasn’t part of the plan, Azula.” said Miranda.

“Plans change, Lawson. And you would do well to cease questioning me.” said Shadow.

“We had a deal!” said Austin.

“You killed my brother, Shepard! Now I will make you feel my pain! Now, you will suffer for it!”

“No!”

There were two loud shots as Shadow fired...

BAD DAY 1

Amy Moffoot
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Story Synopsis: Tired of always being defeated by the same routine, Shendu tells Valmont of a brilliant idea of taking a certain ebony haired out of the equation..

Twist, twist, click, twist..

Tap.. tap.. tap..

"Oh for heavens sake, is it solved yet?" the tapping against the desk ceased as the male voice cut though, holding all air of impatience and a slight lip twitch of a sneer. There were five, all male – even the one in the dress. Or, robe as the spiritual entity residing within him insisted.

"Nearly, boss." came the dim-witted reply of one of the men, cradling the puzzle box and figuring it out. Considering as he was not the sharpest tool in the shed; he certainly was good at solving mystical puzzle boxes. The two other men stood around him in almost a circle, trying to offer hints or suggestions on the box.

A sigh escaped the dress- Robe! - wearing man, turning around to lean gingerly against his desk. Of course, he was none other than Valmont, leader of the Dark Hand. The men below him were his Enforcers; Ratso (the one currently solving the box) Finn and Chow (the two flanking around him.)

Valmont briefly closed his eyes, only for them to open glowing red. His voice, completely different to his usual accent hissed through – almost as it was a strenuous task to do so. This caused the enforcer to fumble slightly, picking up his pace to try and not anger the hitch-hiker inside Valmont.

He turned away from the group, hissing quietly to the other man. "Valmont, Tell me, how do my brothers and sisters; with only being mere hours out of the portal managed to get banished again?" The answer was obvious, they both knew that- but Valmont reckon that he was trying to lead onto something.

"It's those blasted Chans. The old goat casts the spell and Jackie Chan stops us from stopping him." he grumbled back. He paused for a moment, then continued. "...and the child just proves to be an annoyance."

"Indeed.." the demon, Shendu, spoke in almost a drawl "...What if we were to break up

that little routine?"

"The child?" Valmont questioned; thinking to the ebony haired martial artist in training, a scowl forming on his face. She was nothing more than a pinprick to him, although he could see what Shendu was trying to lead him to do. "Oh, I see."

"You want to take her out of the equation. I don't know how much that'll do.." He was cut off by the demon.

"Think! Jackie Chan's actions will be reckless, doing anything to save the brat, if it means giving up the talismans, or letting my sister through.. The child herself is a problem on it's own. Even I was not blind to Hsi Wu's defeat.." his eyes narrowed. "With MY talismans.. She proves to capable in handling them, and not to be underestimated."

"If I didn't know any better, Shendu, I'd say you were complimenting her-" Valmont knew if he could see Shendu, he would be glaring at him. "-In any case, we'll kidnap the girl when we go to the portal's location. No doubt she will be there too."

"Why wait?" the dragon commented; a grin forming on his- or well, Valmont's face. "The faster she is out of the way the better. It will cause much grief and stress to the Chans the longer she is within our grasp.."

"And we can offer her in exchange for the twelve talismans too." Valmont added with an afterthought. Turning round, he faced his enforcers; who looked up at him curiously. They only heard bits and pieces of his conversation with Shendu, and were eager for orders. ..Unless it involved demon portal opening. The location was always horrible for them.

"We're going to school."

-

Jade Chan, resident Ninja Fighter, T-Girl to some, pain in the backside to her enemies, and self-proclaimed leader of the J-team...

Was currently tapping her pencil against her desk and let a quiet, but annoyed sigh escape her lips, whining softly as she rested her head against the desk. The clock's ticking was driving her crazy, and history class was certainly boring her. Slowly, she closed her eyes.

In less than a second, the bell's splitting ring startled her, causing her to jump and bash her back violently against her seat. She groaned; she must of fell asleep. And she got a way with it too, it seemed. Score. Packing her things messily, she stood up and stretched, rubbing her back and slinging her backpack on.

"Awh, did the little ninja-girl not get enough sleep?" came a taunting voice. "Too busy fighting demons? Hii-yaa!" it came again, making mockery of stereotypical sound effects and yells fighters would do.

"Tch." Jade tsked, rolling her eyes. "Can it, Drew. Or I'll have to show you what I did to a bat-demon." The memory was still so fresh, so vivid in her mind. A part of her ached as she felt she lost a friend- but it was for the better. No way would she ever befriend a demon again. But, it was satisfying seeing his look of awe and shock as she soared through the skies- HIS territory, just as easy as he did.

Drew caught up with her, walking alongside her in the hallway with his cronies, laughing as he waved his hands threateningly. "Oooh, i'm SO scared, what are you going to do, cast some freaky ninja spell?" He laughed; and on cue, his cronies did too.

Jade turned, scowling and feeling her hands clenched, but no. She took a calming breath, remembering what her uncle Jackie told her. She did not want to get him in trouble with the school again either.

"No, I'll.." she trailed off. She could feel the cold stone in her foot; the Rabbit Talisman. She had 'borrowed' it as she was late to school, or, was, thankfully a second to spare thanks to the trusty hare. Scoffing, she folded her arms and smirked, showing that she wasn't afraid of Drew. Seeing that his taunts weren't doing anything, he frowned.

"Freak." he called, walking off with his band of friends. Jade stuck her tongue out at him as he left, tscking once more and exiting the hallway into the playground. Stupid Drew. Stupid kids.. Why couldn't they be more like..

Well, what Seymour WAS, until she knew it was Hsi Wu. A nice kid that listened to her, didn't regard her as some freak obsessed with ninjas and demons. Oh well. Not like she wanted to be friends with any of these kids. None of them could hold their own.

Suddenly, she felt a rough hand grab her shoulder. Thinking it was some bully or Drew, she rolled her eyes and turned around. "What's the big ideaaaAH!" she stared, wide eyed as she tried to step away, but the hand was tight.

"Look who we have here." Valmont stated. "You're going to come with us and not cause any problems."

"Yeah, that's right, pipsqueak!" called Chow, the other enforcers leering. Jade wisely ignored the insults- a plan going through her head.

She could take these guys on, she was certain, but.. Her eyes drifted to Hak Foo. That, was a different story entirely. He bared his teeth as she looked at him, then Jade glared up at Valmont.

"When Uncle Jackie finds out.." she started, resisting any attempts as he tried to drag her.

"..You'll be in chains, and we'll be twelve talismans up and a demon free." He finished for her. "Now come along, I wouldn't want to get my suit-" he stopped. Oh yes. He was wearing that.. robe.

"Fat chance!" Jade called, and with a sly movement of her foot, activated the power of the Rabbit. She stomped her foot down on Valmont's, causing him to let go as she sped off.

"Whoa, shorty's got a talisman!" Finn stated the obvious, and with a fiery glare from Valmont, promptly shut up. Shendu was in control now.

"Get her!"

The four enforces chased after her as she literally ran circles around them. She could leave and warn Jackie, but she was confident. With the Rabbit's talisman, there was no way she could loose. Jade was sure she could handle these buffoons. Right? Also, with the crowd of mesmerized kids staring on, she grinned.

Time to show Drew just how much she rocked.

Zooming directly at them, she knocked the five men down, stopping as she grinned down at them.

"Sorry guys, Was running late to school, thought I'd help myself to some T-power." she inspected her nails, drifting to the side as she avoided Ratso's attempt at grabbing her, then zooming to the back of the field from Shendu's fire breath.

"How dare you use my power!" roared the demon. "I will not be beaten by a mere child!" They all got up, just as Jade appeared in front of them.

"Tch, Shendu. You should take a lesson from Hsi Wu. Never mess with the Jadester." she laughed as she could see almost a vein appear in Valmont's forehead. That won't do for his complexion. As she ran circles around them, she barely heard something - not enough time to stop.

"Patient lion pounces speeding prey!"

She let out a loud 'oof' as Hak Foo's fist suddenly shot out and connected with her front, She landed a good feet from them, groaning loudly as she clutched her chest. It felt like she just had a sledgehammer to the ribs. Gingerly, she winced, trying to stand up but couldn't. She cursed herself- she could pack a punch, but the girl was only a kid. A timely

blow from an adult man? "Shoulda packed the Horse.." she complained, looking up wearily as the enforcers circled her.

Jade knew she had been overconfident. Although she sure lay a number on them, she should of just sped away and got Jackie. But no, she had to prove herself. She glanced to the other kids- even Drew looked horrified.. even concerned behind those glasses. Shendu picked Jade up by the front of her orange jacket, glaring at her menacingly.

"Give me the talisman." He demanded coolly. Jade glanced all about for an escape plan, but at the moment, her ribs were bruised from that punch. She wasn't given much time as she was tipped upside down and was shaken.

Of course, the Talisman was safely tucked into her shoe, being held down by her foot. But the action alone was torture for her.

"Alright, alright!" She complained, the shaking stopped for a moment. she could feel the blood rush to her head. "It's in my right shoe! Just stop shaking me before I throw up all on your pretty dress."

As the talisman was retrieved from her shoe, Jade was tossed unceremoniously to the ground, landing with another wince. Before she could stand up and escape; she was grabbed in Hak Foo's crushing grip.

Valmont was back in control, blinking as he saw that the task was succeeded. "Well, that certainly was easier than I expected." he cheerily stated, Jade thrashing in the martial artist's grip.

"Easy? I kicked your guys backside so hard you had to get this lug to hit me. Ugh. Hitting a child and a girl? Where's your sense of chivalry?" Hak Foo squeezed her in his grip, causing her to grunt in pain as she felt her already bruised chest hurt. She was met with a hiss from Shendu.

"Quiet." he ordered. He looked up to see a woman approaching them, frightened kids all around. With a sweeping motion; they were covered in smoke and disappeared without a trace. Jade could only pleadingly watch as she was whisked away.

"Bad day.."

Exiled

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„Ethaine!" Sanars deep voice cut through the cold mountain air. "Ethaine!" The teenaged mage made her way through the village, wearing her hair in a thick braid going down to her hips and swinging with every step. She stopped as she came across one of the other villagers. "Excuse me Lyrel, have you seen Ethaine somewhere?" The old woman smiled at her. "I have, Child. She went to Merons hut not long ago." Sanar thanked her, then headed towards the smiths house. She found Ethaine there with some of her friends, including Merons daughter. "There you are Ethaine! I asked you to meet me at Midday, didn't I?" she greeted the girl harshly. Ethaine turned around. "And I told that I want to go with Caoimhe today, Sanar!" the twelve-year-old replied. Sanar shook her head. "You waste enough time with your friends. Your duty comes first!" She turned around, expecting the girl to follow her, but Ethaine just stamped her foot and glared angrily at Sanar from beneath the auburn strands of hair hanging in her face. "No! I'm not going!" Sanar stopped. "I won't repeat myself Ethine. Come. Now!" The girl didn't react. Sanar sighed then stepped back to Ethaine and grabbed her arm, dragging her along and away her friends. Ethaine tried to free herself, but had little chance. "Let me go! I don't want your stupid exercises!" Sanar continued to drag her along. "I'm your teacher and I say when we do them. End of Discussion!" she replied, then continued her way to the clearing where they normally trained. She pushed Ethaine down, then kneeled down in front of her. "We will repeat the last exercise, and we won't leave until you managed some decent flames." Several hours later they were still at that exercise. Sanar already started to form simple figures out of her flames, while Ethaine still struggled to keep the flames alive and steady. Sanar looked up from her spell and over to Ethaine, then sighed. "How often do I have to tell you? You have to focus on the spell. Keep it steady." Ethaine frowned back at her. "Of course it's easy for you! You have much more practice, because you're older and do nothing but train!" Sanar lowered her hands and frowned. "Don't you dare to talk to me like that. I'm a full member of the tribe and the shaman in waiting. You owe me respect!" Ethaine scoffed. "Well good for you! Atleast I have friends. Not like the weird and lonely oh-so-important..." "Enough!" Sanar jumped to her feet. "Enough!" "Or what?" Ethaine was standing now

as well. The flames still danced around her hands even though she clearly forgot about the spell. "Or what Sanar?" she asked again. Sanar pushed her back. "You will not talk to me like this!" she said pointing at her, then her eyes fell on Ethaines hands. The flames had grown bigger and almost reached her elbows. "Stop it Ethaine! Cancel the spell..." "I don't give a damn about your stupid exercise. I don't care for your spe..." The fire erupted into darting flames, covering Ethaine's body. Sanar jumped back from the sudden blast of heat. Ethaine screamed, Sanar screamed, somebody else screamed. She forgot any magic and shoved Ethaine into the half-molten snow still covering the ground. Sanar tried to beat out the flames, and suddenly there was Briac, the son of the tribe leader, helping her. But no matter how hard they tried, the flames just kept reigniting. It took them several minutes to finally put them out, and by now, most of Ethaine's hair and clothing as well as big parts of her skin were burned away. "She needs healing!" Sanar said, then tried to cast a healing spell. She had never been much of a healer, but before she could even try Sanar was pushed aside by Briac. "You! What did you do to her?" he asked with anger. "I didn't do anything! It was her own spell..." Sanar began to reply, but Briac cut her off. "Don't lie to me, Rael! I know you hated her, everybody does!" He shook his head, then carefully lifted Ethaine up and carried her towards the village. "Follow, Rael. Don't even think about running." He ordered without even looking back. Sanar followed the man. "I did nothing wrong!" she repeated, but once again Briac shook his head. "Tell that my father. Tell that her father!" When they reached the village the first people started running towards them. "Briac, what happened?" "By the gods, who is that?" "What happened?" "That's Ethaine! By the gods, what happened to her?" "Silence!" Briac's voice boomed over the talking crowd. "Cadeyrn, get the Shaman and Ethaine's parents and bring them to my father. Bring Rael's father as well. Brandon, take the young Rael to the Great House and lock her in! Everyone else out of my way!" he commanded. The two men he addressed hurried to carry out his orders. Brandon took Sanar's arm and led her towards the Village Center. Sanar tried to protest, but Brandon wasn't even listening. When they reached the main Building, Brandon led her into an empty cell and locked her in. Then the waiting began. The chief came to her after some time and questioned her, then left without any further word. It was several hours later and already nighttime when the next visitor came. Máedóc. Her father. He entered the room without a word, just staring at her with his dark eyes. Sanar came mostly after her mother, but her dark eyes and even darker hair were inherited from her father. They looked at each other for a moment, their eyes nearly black in the dim light of the lonely torch, before Sanar went over and embraced

him. Máedóc didn't resist, but he didn't respond either. Sanar stepped back and looked up to the tall man. "I didn't do it! It was her own spell that did this!" Her father responded calmly. "I believe you, but even if you speak the truth it doesn't mean that you're not to blame." Sanar took another step back. "You can't be serious!" Her father just shook his head. "The chief and the elders have yet to decide your punishment. You will be told tomorrow. Until then, try to sleep." He looked at his daughter for another moment, then opened the door and left. The guard locked the door behind him. Sanar stood there numb, trying to comprehend. She turned around and laid down on the bed. Sanar awoke early the next morning as the chief paid her another visit. She bowed her head as he entered, then shyly looked up to the old man. "We have decided your punishment." Sanar bit her lip. "You will be exiled from the tribe and marked as an Unwanted, banishing..." "You can't do that!" "... banishing you from all tribes to the end of your days! So we decided, and so is my word!" he continued, angry about her interruption. "You may not have cast the spell that killed Ethaine, but the Elders and I still hold you responsible for it." He paused and looked at her. Since there was nothing to say, Sanar kept quiet, and the chief continued. "You will be granted the necessary supplies for survival as well as food for three days. Furthermore, at the pleas of your father, you will be given a weapon to defend yourself." Sanar looked up, surprised. She didn't expect that after their meeting last night. Her surprise grew even more as the Chief waved at the guard, who revealed not simply a sword or a spear, but her staff. The chief took the staff and offered it to her. Sanar stood up and took it. "You give me... my staff?" she asked. She still couldn't believe her eyes. "Understand this, young Rael: I'm no cruel man, nor are the Elders. We do not wish you dead. There have, however, been other voices in the village. This exile is not only punishment, but also protection." He sighed. "I don't expect you to believe or understand this right now. You will leave this evening." He turned around and left. Two women entered, equipped with all the tools necessary for the tattoo. Sanar followed their orders and laid down on the bed. What sense would there be in resistance now? She started crying silently, and one of the women pushed a small piece of cloth at her left eye, to prevent the tears from ruining the mark. Sanar stared at the wooden ceiling for a moment longer, then closed her right eye as well and embraced the darkness that followed.

Hullo. My name's Jacob and I'm completely new in writing fanfiction... and totally fresh with writing in English, and I still need to gain experience. So, if you, Fanatical Publishing readers, would be so kind and help me, please send your thoughts at kuba22277@gmail.com, adding LM_Review in the title.

Thank you very much!

The white snow leopard is standing in the center of the room, holding his e-journal in his left paw. He's surrounded by steel bars, locking him safely inside. He's wearing a black leather jacket, which is torn and really damaged, as well as his long, blue jeans. He stands in front of two dark silhouettes, thinking about how to tell them the truth.

"Tell him the truth. He must hear your story to trust you" the leopard hears suddenly inside his mind. He knows that this is the voice of that blue vixen standing behind the tall, red vulpine, Krystal.

"Do you want to know everything about me?" he asks the vulpine after a short pause.

"Yes. All we want to know is the truth"

"Well, then we must go back to this day" the leopard says, turning on his e-journal and reverting to the oldest entry, 12th October 2431 Earthen Time, which was two years before the actual day.

"You want the truth? Then listen carefully..."

A/N: this one was used to be FanFiction With No Name in English, but I decided to change it a bit and make it (not quite, but always) another story. Have fun reading and await 4 more!

Ahh, and sorry for the many vulgarisms. They're placed on purpose, to show more greatly the change inside... Okay, I'm telling too much...

STAR FOX universe:

LOST

MEMORIE S

Chapter one: The beginning

12th October 2431, 8:47am, New Texas, Earthen colony on Vendetta planet

"Jack! Get the fuck behind some cover!" Mike shouted to his friend, but he probably didn't hear him because all of the noise caused by shooting guns and artillery... Or just didn't want to hear.

The planet was in state of war for three months now. The Earthen Military wanted to change this planet into military outpost, which meant either killing or taking the residents from the planet's surface. Of course people of Vendetta didn't want to give away that easily their homes, so it ended up with the first option.

"Jack, hide behind something!" Mike shouted again, watching as his friend is covering behind a steel barrel, which didn't give any protection against projectiles. Jack didn't respond, he just crouched there with a blank look on his face.

Then it hit him. Mike instantly remembered his last conversation with his friend.

"Listen. There's no chance for us to win. They're stronger, they have more powerful guns, they-"

"Shut up. You wouldn't say that if Amy was still alive!" Mike interrupted his friend's train of thoughts. He knew that it was the case. Jack wanted to propose to Amy few hours before the Army's attack. The men of Vendetta instantly ran to outpost, while the women were sent to the nuclear shelters, but, during the evacuation, the Earthen Army bombed the walking people. No one survived. Amy was one of the victims of this attack.

"I KNOW, RIGHT!" Jack shouted angrily at his friend, "It's just... you don't know how it's like losing everything in just one second..."

Believe me, I know...

"I... I don't want to live anymore..."

"Hey, hey, don't tell me this bullshit! You know that's not true!" Mike grabbed Jack's shoulders and shook energetically, trying to shake off those thoughts inside his mind. Michael T. Gray knew exactly where those feelings could bring the poor soul of his friend.

"GRENADE!" the sudden scream pulled the human back to reality. The grenade rolled slowly an inches next to Jack. He took a quick glance at the small bomb and took it in his hands.

"FOR THE MOTHER OF FUCK, THROW AWAY THAT GRE-" Mike tried to intervene, but it was too late. In one big explosion he lost his last friend in this godforsaken encounter.

"Jack? Jack you motherfucker! I won't forget what you did!" he shouted with all his power. In sudden flush of energy he took his Advanced Full-auto Assault Rifle, or A-FAR for short, took the safety off and charged onto the small soldier squad on the other side of the barricade. It was a dumb move, and he realized it few seconds later. Even if he killed almost every one of them, the sniper nailed him in the torso. The energy vanished instantly, changing into instant coolness. The darkness covered his eyes, and he fell on his knees.

Shit, Shit, SHIT! GET UP! he shouted at himself in his mind, but soon he felt too tired to even think. With a hard impact he lost all connection to the real world.

He was running. Nothing could stop him at this moment. Surrounded by a bright light, he just kept running forward. He saw his memories like pictures on his left and right. The pictures were changing immediately, but soon stopped at one.

"Are you going somewhere?" the young woman asked the man, who was currently getting out of the bed.

"Yeah, they gave me a mission without asking me for agreement. Again" he growled lightly, taking his old but still good gun, the 34th version of Glock 17 in his left hand.

"You could use a hand, I suppose" she said, kissing in on the cheek and standing up completely naked. He gazed at her and she saw a sudden lust flowing through him.

Not now... Not now... he repeated to himself, effectively refraining self from throwing her on the bed. There were more important things to do.

"Mike, can I go with you?" she asked, taking him by the hand.

"Mia, I told you already few days ago. No problem, wait in the car, I'll join you in the moment" he responded, grabbing his black leather jacket and his reliable blue jeans and going to the bathroom. He entered the shower and opened warm water for a full blast. He adjusted his back so all the water fell on his head and neck, then he reached for a shower gel. Suddenly, he heard a big explosion. Not caring about anything, he jumped out of the shower and took on his jeans while running to the exit. He didn't believe what he saw. He saw Mia laying on the ground not far away from a destroyed car. She didn't have one leg,

and her body was a bloody mess. It was a miracle that she was still breathing.

"Mike, they were waiting for you... Run..." she said, coughing with blood.

"They? Who they are? Mia? Don't leave me!" he shouted to her, trying to pick her up and help her... somehow. Seeing her in this state made him feel like he wanted to kill himself.

"Those attackers were from-" she began to speak, but a sniper bullet silenced her forever. Mike quickly jumped behind a car wreck to search for a sniper. He knew that if he open himself, there will be no Michael Gray. Then he saw him - the sniper was standing on the roof of the three story building on the other side of the street. Mike took out his Glock, took the safety off and aimed only once. With a loud "bang" sound, the sniper fell from the building, crashing with high speed on the streets below.

"That's for Mia, bastard!" Mike ran to his girlfriend and watched in terror all the wounds. Most of them were from the explosion, but he saw burns, too. Since cars didn't use gasoline or any flammable material as a fuel, they didn't explode in flames anymore. They didn't explode, after all. That meant someone shooted at the car, giving Mia small time to escape.

Mike knew exactly what kind of weapon left burns on the skin, Tyrogenium bomb. It was manufactured by only one company in entire Earthen Space Zone.

"Mia, I promise you, I swear - I won't die unless I find who gave them order to kill you... me. I won't give up!"

I won't give up... I swore that to her. I WON'T GIVE UP! Mike screamed on his mind, reverting back to the reality. He didn't knew how, but he regained consciousness and managed to stand up, despite the damage he took from the enemy fire. He looked down at his torso and he didn't saw any blood or wounds - just one more hole in his leather jacket. Mike picked up his A-FAR and aimed for the last soldier in that group. He threw his gun and began to run away, but Mike was faster. With one shot he took out the last soldier.

"Hey guys, look! Mike's alive! Let's take him to the medical center!" he heard, but it was like a shouting from miles away. The words echoed in his head, the world began to swirl, and he lost control of his body. Once again he began to feel tired and soon he, again, lost consciousness.

E-Journal entry number one.

12th October 2431, 9:24pm

I've finally regained control of my body. This morning fight was strange... I don't know... I'm supposed to be dead, yet I'm alive and stronger than ever. I still think about that memories... Maybe I stood up because I remembered that I swore to Mia? This is a question that I won't probably answer. Never.

Earthen Army sent me a letter today. Strange, eh? They said they will leave the colony if I go with them. They probably know about that event more than me, so I decided I'll agree. If they kill me, I don't care. But I think they won't. I'm going to Military Camp tomorrow. Wish me luck.

Capt. Michael Thomas Gray, former leader of Vendetta Defense Forces

10th October 2431, 10:00am, Blackrock City on New Earth planet, Earthen Space Military and Interspace Communications HQ

"Maj. Gen. Rodriguez, report to the Communication center immediately" the feminine voice from the speakers sounded throughout all the base.

"What now?" Carlos Rodriguez asked himself, once again having to abort his current activities. He stood up from his chair and went through the doors on his left.

"What's happening?" he groaned to the computers in front of him.

"Incoming call from ESM HQ on Earth Prime" the computer answered.

"Connect me" Gen. Rodriguez stood in front of the holographic camera to be visible on the other side of the comm interface. The lasers on his left began to form into human silhouette, then changed into the shape of Maj. Gen. Blazkoff, main general of Earth Prime's Space Military.

"Carlos, old friend! Long time, niet see!" Vladimir Blazkoff laughed, seeing the face of his old friend from Military School.

"I'm pleased to meet you to, Vlad. What brings you to me?"

Blazkoff instantly lost his smile and good humor. He looked with somewhat scary gaze on gen. Rodriguez, then he spoke silently. "We've found them... They're in sector Z-11"

Carlos began to tremble. He knew this day would come. He knew that the discovery of the new race will divide humanity into two - the ones who'll say "kill them before they'll kill us", and those, who'll try to manage peace between our kinds. Still, there wasn't any proof of this. They only found a star system with life signs. It couldn't mean anything - just unregistered human-conquered planets. But he knew inside this wasn't true. They have finally found the aliens - after about 400 years, humanity finally found other kind in "their" galaxy.

"What should we do?" Rodriguez asked, having no idea what could they do in that situation.

"I think we should remain silent. For a couple of months. We'll think what we'll do. But for now, consider that this conversation never happened. Earth Prime out" Blazkoff sighed, cutting out the com-link.

"SHIT! TOO EARLY!" Rodriguez shouted, smacking his fist on the table. He quickly wrote new number on the comm panel and opened new com-link, this time only voice transmission. He waited a few seconds, and clicked secure connection button.

"Emperor Bowman, they know..."

13th October, 2431, 9:10am, Vendetta Crossroads

"Yet again thrown inside the center of this godforsaken conflict... But maybe this time I'll end this fight instead of making it bigger" Mike thought while approaching the Vendetta Crossroads. It was the hub for all roads on Vendetta. Currently only three from twelve roads were useful - one to refugee's camp, one to Rebels' bunker and one to Earthen

Military base. He took the third one and proceeded forward.

Vendetta was a martian-type planet - only rocks and red sand. It was liveable just because of terramorphing. The weather center on the north pole lowered the temperature to the "pleasant" 31 degrees Celsius (it was yet better than 47 degrees with climate control shut off), pumped the oxygen into the atmosphere and caused the rains to occasionally fall on the Roost, the only Vendetta city, now being completely in ruins.

Mike always liked that planet. It hid many secrets, just like him. The atmosphere was making the life almost like survival - many residents had to go for searching the water, others were flying to other planets to buy food for entire Vendetta population... It wasn't the best place to live.

But it makes people tougher, and you can't have nothing to do on this godforsaken planet. Mike smiled, remembering his first two weeks on this "survival center". He almost starved to death, when he went on a walk during the sandstorm. He had to hide inside some kind of a cave and sit here until the storm vanished. It took four days, and within that time, he learned that you have to take something to eat when you walk out of home.

He finally saw the military base. It was enormous, but that didn't surprise him - the new building technology allowed to build 50-story building in two, three weeks. It had four landing pads for the dreadnought-class cruisers, a cafeteria, two Headquarters, a barrack, capable of training simultaneously about 300 soldiers... and many more. In two months they made here an army bigger than people of Vendetta in 10 years.

Mike approached to the control point and went to the gate. The soldier sitting in the outpost was sleeping. Mike ignored him and silently opened the gate for himself. He knew that they won't kill him, at least before someone orders them to do this; he was highly recognizable - he was a former leader of Vendetta Defense Forces, one of better soldiers in Earthen Military and a former most-wanted mercenary. There was no doubt that every man in this base knew about him.

"Name?" The soldier asked before allowing the human to enter the HQ.

"Michael Thomas Gray, from VDF"

The soldier looked amazed at Mike, "You mean... you are that Michael T. Gray?"

"Yep"

"I thought so." he said silently, "Listen, I was once in VDF under your command. I owe you one, because you were the best boss I've ever had. Listen, Gen. Red is a one mean son... i meant daughter of a bitch-"

Now that was Mike's turn to be shocked, "Wait, wait, wait... Your general is a woman?" he chuckled.

"Yes, and she's the worst boss you could ever have... But she likes you, that's why she wanted to speak to you. Okay, I'll open the doors for you. On the right wall you should see the red stripe. Follow it and you'll find her office." the soldier said professionally and opened the big steel doors. "Good luck, sir"

"Landing procedure active. Welcome aboard, captain Leslie" someone said through the communication link.

The Arwing mk. I wasn't the best ship when it came to landing, because it was still a prototype, but even captain Nora Leslie couldn't afford a new one. It was a gift from Dr. Phoenix from Space Dynamics laboratories.

The canopy opened and the beautiful, red vixen got out of her ship.

"Holy shit! What have you done to my little Arwing?" The green chimpanzee shouted, sprinting to the damaged fighter.

"What the-" Nora managed to say before the angry, green monkey pushed her out of the way, knocking her hard on the floor. "Andy!"

"Just... Just stay calm, stay calm" he said to himself aloud, turning around. "What do you want, ship wrecker?"

"I risked my life to help the cruiser fight off the space pirates, and you push me on the ground like that?" she growled

He let out a sigh of annoyance. "Listen, you hired me as a mechanic, not as a medic. We have WIMO. Let me do my work, or maybe do not make my work harder. She was in a perfect state" he said, pointing to the ship, "...now, she is missing a wing, the G-Diffuser looks like it wants to fly away without the rest of a ship, and the hull, once polished and shiny... NOW HAS A BIG BLACK HOLE!"

"C'mon, Nora, let the crazy with his craziness" The grey cheetah gave the vixen a hand, helping her get up.

"You know, I heard this!"

"I meant it for you to hear!"

"Hey, guys, calm down! It was, indeed, my fault to return the ship in such a bad state, but that's the cost of being a vigilante! Oh man... We lately can't speak to each other..."

"Yeah... You know, I... I'm sorry, captain" Andy said after a brief break, "I shouldn't react like this... You didn't want to do this to her..."

"It's not only your fault... We need some serious mission, or something... I need a mission" the cheetah stated, turning around to Nora. "I'm sorry, too..."

"Never mind, Runner. I guess we all need to take a brief break from all this laziness"

Of course if we won't kill each other during the process...

She grabbed the chimp and the cheetah by the hands and dragged them in the way of the command center.

"What are you doing?" Andy asked when he suddenly began to be dragged.

"I said we need a break, so we NEED a break, you too, Mr. Mechanic!"

"I was awaiting your arrival, Mr. Gray" the young feminine voice greeted the human

when he entered the desired office. He didn't see her face, though. She sat behind the wall of darkness, lighted only by small desk lamp, which revealed her female silhouette, but nothing more than that.

"Erm... Do I know you?" he said, when her voice ringed a bell in his head. He remembered that voice.

"Maybe yes. Why don't you take a look?" she asked, standing up from her chair and walking into the light, slightly smiling.

Oh... My... God...

"Lisa? Is that really you?" Mike was completely shocked. The face he saw belonged to his dead sister, Lisa Shepard.

"My name is Megan now" she whispered, "But yes. It's me"

"H-How!"

"That doesn't matter right now. When I found you on this godforsaken battlefield, and saw what you can do, I had to call you here."

"Wait, wait, wait, wait. Why did you attack my home? Why did you kill almost half of my friends?"

"I was sent here the day before yesterday. I didn't know that planet was in control of humans. The main general of ESM said that this planet is inhabited by very aggressive animals, which are needed to be extinct... If I knew the truth, I would abort all the military tasks."

"So why don't you do that, then?" he said, crossing his hands and cocking the eyebrow.

"It's not that easy. I have to send the information to main HQ, then ask for a permission for a retreat... The procedure has started. I need now a permission. Then we'll back off of this planet"

"So the last general was an enormous liar?"

"You could say that. But it's not the time for this. I need you now."

"What exactly?"

That bitch, I will kill her when I'll get back to Vendetta!

Mike was barely finding the strength to keep his mouth shut all the way to B-31, the newly discovered planet in unexplored sector of our galaxy. She made an idiot of himself, sending him on a suicide mission in middle of unknown planet, probably inhabited by aliens. He got to know all this from the pilot of the ship he was in. In the Earthen Military, rumors were faster than the speed of light. They said that some general from Earth Prime discovered a system, which wasn't in control of humans, but it was in control of intelligent creatures. They sent a reconnaissance squad to check this out, but they never came back.

Why did she do that to me! I'm her brother, after all! That soldier on the entrance was

right. I should have refused all this... Wait, what am I talking about! I couldn't refuse! Oh shut up already!

"Hey, where are we?" he asked after really long silence.

"I don't know... maybe four hours from our destination... I can be wrong, though. Just go to sleep, I'll wake up when we'll arrive" the pilot responded. He sounded somewhat confused, but Mike didn't say anything. He did what the pilot said and soon he went to really deep sleep.

"NORA! LET ME OUT OF THIS!" The yellow canary shouted, when the red vixen, with help of the grey cheetah managed to get him inside the escape pod.

"Sorry, Chip, but if you have shut up earlier, we, PROBABLY, weren't doing this" she barely managed to say this through the waves of uncontrollable laughter.

"Captain Leslie, let out Chip from the capsule, he can't survive 5 seconds without eating something"

"OH REALLY! YOU TOO, WIMO?" Chip shouted angrily, trying to kick the door open.

"ANDY! Prepare the capsule to launch! Destination - Corneria!" Nora and Runner shouted simultaneously.

"Yes sir!" Andy chuckled, entering the coordinates and sending the escape pod into space!

"WHEN I'LL GET OUT OF THERE, YOU'LL BE SORRY!" the canary shouted when the pod engaged its engines.

"So, we got rid of that stupid bird for next three hours. What we'll do now?"

"We're going after him" she said, showing his ID card to the others, "He won't exit the airport without this"

"Sooo... The little vacation on Corneria?" Andy asked.

"Not exactly. We're going to visit our old friends"

A/N: So what do you think? I tried to make this as best as I could! Please, send me your feedback. I kinda feel that I don't explain the situations very well and the dialogues are just plain words, whaddya think?

My name's Jakub, but I like when people name me Jacob, just because. I started my adventure with writing exactly... four years ago, when I wrote my first novel, "Miecz i Sztylet" ("Sword and a dagger") ever since then I wanted to post FanFiction about my fav franchise: Star Fox series. But, since in Poland only Xbox and Playstation were known, there was no place for Nintendo fan and his stupid stories. That's how I jumped into English writing :D Ever since I tried to improve, but I still tend to make time errors, or simply stupid mistakes.

As for now, I'm developing few stories:

Lost Memories, a Star Fox fanfic utilizing my and Julius Cowan's characters,

Hard Times, a Star Fox fanfic request for a deviantart user Shamedwolf

F-Zero: Unforeseen consequences, a fanfic request from Sylux0075

A short oneshot SF fanfic for Deviantart user PKUltimaga

...And a script for upcoming comic project along with UN4Ever and JECBrush (Both are deviantart users) - Starfox Squadron.

If you want to track any progress on these, visit my profile ([kuba22277.deviantart.com](https://www.deviantart.com/kuba22277))

POETRY is published here thanks to John Mahler's [Quotes of the Day](#).

Some people, at least, have enjoyed my Quotes of the Day, so here they are, for your amusement and bemusement: one entire year's worth of quotes. My quotes by the way; nobody else's. These are my thoughts and observations on the world around us: funny, sad, uplifting, evocative, inspiring, silly, and occasionally just plain stupid, they are all here for your perusal: enjoy!

THE LIGHT

Kavita Rae Songbird
of thegothicsongbird@gmail.com

Now and then I would see a light,
A light that was not meant for me,
A light that I could barely see.
"I'm not dead,"
I would scream,
But still it called me from my dreams.
In the dark I was alone,
Yet the light made me fear home.
I started to avoid the ones,
Ones that I knew had cared
For so many years now;
They seemed gone:
Lost in a world of brightness
That I refuse to take as kindness.
A darkness that was untold
They thought it would break
My apparent heart of gold.
Yet still I was burning from
The light they told me was harmless.
It was scorching me,
Yet somehow they couldn't see,
See the burns their light left me.
My skin turned black from the fire
To match a tainted heart
That knew only Anxiety as its Master.

PETER PANICS

Nikhil Kartha
of nickkartha@gmail.com

Peter flew through the clouded sky.
If he stopped, he would forever die.
For then the pixie dust would stop flowing
Through his blood and would start slowing
His mind causing Neverland and him
To face a very bitter grim.

Hook was right on Peter's tail
With Smee tending to Roger's sail.
The good ol' Cap'n, sword in hand,
Yelled to the boy of Neverland,
"Peter Pan I've got you now.
Your escape, I won't allow!"

But then a flash of light appeared,
Blinding Peter who then feared
The men of white in the room of night
Would, in the darkness, suck out his might
"Breathe, son, Breathe!", a voice demanded
but the boy, Peter, could not be commanded.

With the last of his might, he put up a fight
Jumped of the table feeling this wasn't right
He ran and ran and ran and ran
To as far away as he could and can
And then through a wall of melted sand,
He flew to a new magic land.

SHY GUY (8/24/2012)

Zuko4444
of legodude93@charter.net

I just want to get outside
And meet people,
Make some acquaintances or even a few friends;
People that share my interests
Or have a similar story to that of mine.

But my weakness is that
I'm a shy guy.

I need to get a job
Because I'm not going to school.
It also keeps me from trouble and boredom;
I want to show that I can be responsible for once
That I can keep a commitment.

But my weakness is that
I'm a self-conscious guy.

I have never experienced love
For someone special,
I was never interested until now.
I need someone to get me out of this rut of loneliness,
I need someone to wake me up.

But my weakness is that
I'm a sensitive guy.

I may live my entire life with this weakness,
How do others overcome it?
I just can't overcome it!
No one wants someone
Who's afraid of themselves.

But can I make my weakness
Into my strength?

((I am simply an amateur poet from deviantart. I love finding new ways to expand and

practice my craft, such as trying out new fixed forms of poetry. If you like what you see here, visit my page on deviantart--> <http://zuko4444.deviantart.com/> Thanks!))

LIVING A LIE and VINDICTIVE THOUGHTS

Kela Lewis-Morin
of

Living a Lie.

You say things you don't mean when you're angry.
You call me a waste of space and that you can't stand me.

When the dust settles you say you don't mean it.
You say I should know better than to believe it.

As usual I foolishly upkeep your illusive hold on me.
I allow you to mute my thoughts and take control of me.

You promise and reassure me that it will never happen again.
That this is the last time and you will put it all to an end.

But I know promises only comfort fools,
Who readily allow others to pull the wool

Over our eyes because it is easier to swallow the lies.
Can it be a mistake if it happens more than twice?
Despite my preaching I can never take my own advice.

I've realised that this aggression is a part of you
And because I can never dare to part from you.
I have to believe the love you have for me is true.

Sometimes you have to take a lie not for what it is
But for the truth and reality it suspends.

Withdraw your vengeful tongue and revert it into a kiss.
So we can all carry on living in this false pretence.

Kela Lewis-Morin

Vindictive Thoughts.

Evil, is knowing better

But purposely doing worse.
Toying with love by the tether
And laughing when it hurts.
Prevailing by any measure
With no intention to reimburse.
Flaunting stolen fabricated treasures
Gaining what you never truly deserved.
To live a life of complete leisure
And never keeping to your words.
Manipulating and applying pressure
Because the rich and poor can never be merged.
The idea of a just world is just a rehearsed lecture.
Those who seek to create this will be publically purged.
We all fall victim to man kinds thin, green texture.
This is the life we are unwittingly trained to preserve.
To be human is a gracious gift but also a captivating curse.

Kela Lewis-Morin.

THE VAGUE LORD

Constantine Baxter
of eldy112@gmail.com

Through the window lattice he comes
He comes to me after dusk
Each night he tortures and soothes
My soul
On his relentless horse he comes

The horse of lores, on whose horns
Gracefully fork the black thorns
The thorns of blazing time
Blazing past and blazing light
Stomping on my blessed delight

He stomps with his hooves of hell
No doubt it's hell where he'd dwell
A green flame burns on his shoes
And so it smoulders, so it glows
Who hears now my inhuman bellows?

For I scream, the horse's treading on me
Only in my dream, disembowelling me
The pain; an illusion of Thee, dear rider
I look up to thee, masked rider, and say:
Old friend, let me see your wretched face

Once again.

BELOVED CADAVER

Jónný Hekla Hjaltadóttir
of j_hekla@hotmail.com

There once was a boy whom his girl loved,
She was to be forever his beloved,
They used to sit up all night,
And laugh by the warm candlelight.

However, every time when they went out,
People gasped and ran all about.
The boy eventually never out went,
Instead, they stayed in and more time spent.

But one secret the boy didn't know,
That girl had died a long time ago,
And now she was nothing but rotting remains,
When she was cut with glass, nothing spilled out her veins.

Eventually, the boy laid with her in bed,
Still with no idea, that she was really dead,
The boy never the clues spotted,
He grew older as the corpse rotted.

Her maggots never entered his sight,
Despite her being his new bride.
Her strong scent never he smelled,
Forever with her, in darkness he dwelled.

Jónný Hekla Hjaltadóttir

A THRILL THEN THE KILL

David Villegas
of iconsomnio@yahoo.com

The hour of fate a divine state, live or die, within or without. The justification of a gasp, grasp the anxiety. A drip of sweat, mental exhaustion takes its toll, the fear of the knife cutting your throat, hear the degrading hope inside every exhale. Heart throbbing your confusions in control, blood boiling creating a void in the pit of your stomach. A scream breaks through your chattering teeth, uncovering the truth. The killer has won this round of hiding go seek.

YOUR LIGHT

David McKinstry
of davidm19@uw.edu

This is my second acrostic I've ever written, I hope everyone enjoys it. It is dedicated to my queen.

I feel the warmth of the light
Living in my heart
Only you could give off such heat.
Vowing to do all I can do
Every second of every day
Your happiness is what I desire.
On this night I ask one thing of you
Understand, my dear, I love you

OBJECTIFY, PART II

Samantha Altrosse
of katrina.merritt@gmail.com

This is a remnant of a dark and scary part of my life that recently re-surfaced when I was least expecting it. Recovery is a process, and I don't ever want a victim of abuse, be it physical, emotional, or otherwise, to feel like they are alone or out of hope. Keep pushing; take it one day at a time, and don't ever let anyone tell you that you are anything less than amazing.

If only. Someone to hold me, someone who cares.

And, I don't mind being your slave.

In a world where nearly everything hurts, I need you.

Whomever you are. I don't know. You're out there.

I'm hurting over here. And yes, you, come make it better.

Please.

Place your collar around my neck.

I'll be your slave, your object.

Keep me in my little cage. I'll be good.

And if I'm bad, teach me a lesson.

Hurt me, and go right back to protecting me.

Please.

I promise I won't mind.

I don't want to have the rest of the world hurting me.

Only you, my guardian, whomever you are.

Only you are allowed to hurt me at day's end.

And I'm okay with that.

Please.

I'll do whatever you ask, short of giving up my faith.

Just send me to do your bidding.

I won't mess up if I can help it.

And if I do, just punish me.

Then protect me again.

Please.

I'm sick of braving it alone.

Or braving it with someone who is only half there.

So have my back, and I'll have yours.

I can't promise I'll think it's love.

But I will verbalize to the contrary if you wish.

Please.

Pain, pleasure, protection.

Use me, abuse me.

Just please, please, don't throw me away.

If I'm only one of your treasures, at least I have a shot at being treasured...

...right, Master?

TOMORROW I WILL

Bloodymess
of bloodymess@gmx.de

If you like my poem, dark, comedy and/or vampires check out my DA-Gallery for more awesome stuff!

<http://bloodymess-vaot.deviantart.com/>

Tomorrow I will...

Tomorrow I will...

Ride a dragon

Win the race

Save the world

And go to space

Tomorrow I will...

Become famous

Lose some weight

Rule the world

Find my soulmate

Tomorrow I will...

Make a fortune

Be the best

Quit my job

And pass that test

Tomorrow I will make my way!

How else should I endure today?

A VALENTINE

Tyler Tumilty
of tyler.tumil@gmail.com

As in Edgar Allan Poe's poem "A Valentine" if you look at the first letter of the first line, the second letter of the second line, and so on you'll see the name of my love. Also thank you very much for even considering publishing my work! This is my DeviantArt-
> <http://zhadowsxxx.deviantart.com/>

Heat radiates between us
Deep in my heart, do you feel it-
Beating faster for you?
Writing soothes my passions
So I shall keep from offending,
I can reach but my hand stops-
Disapproval is what I fear..

I'M CONFUSED

Mathios13
of mathijsboeijenga@hotmail.com

I don't know what to do.
Those feelings in my heart.
I know I love you.
But where do I start?
All those poems I wrote those days.
The mail I sent a time ago.
Trying to make it clear trough these ways.
But yet I don't know.
Know if you feel the same.
If you think about me.
Or if I am a blame.
You have to set me free.
Let me know if there is a chance.
Or if there will never be.
Will there be some romance.
Or won't there be a you and me.
I tried so hard to make it clear.
And with this poem again.
You are very dear.
I will love as much as I can.
But afraid to put it to an end.
Trying to stay in touch.
I don't want to lose you as a friend.
But I love you so much.
Would you please tell me.
If it is a yes or a no.
That way I can set my heart free.
And be able to let it go.
Will you be my love.
Or become my foe.
Be the guy I dream off.
Or will you end the show.