

Fanatical Publishing's

Weekly Review

Issue #57

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AND NOW, a word from the publisher:

Hello folks, Jochannon here; first let me say thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy, and please feel free to share it with your friends, re-post it to your profile, spread it around; the more people who get to read it, the better!

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If you want to contribute, I'd love to see your work, send it to me at the aforementioned e-mail address with: 'category(prose, fanfic, poetry), story title, author's name' in the subject line: please include the text of your story in the body of the email, and please include a cover letter about you, your work, or whatever; include any links you want.

Do you have any questions or comments? If you do, I'd to hear them; write to me at the aforementioned e-mail address.

I'm bad at stopping these things, so I'll just say again: thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy!

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AND NOW, another word from the publisher:

Hello, folks, you may not know this, but I'm a writer too. One of my more popular works is the Lurk series: It's a hodge-podge collection of bad jokes, stupid pop culture references, action, adventure, sex, a quest for true love, and an incredibly ugly hat:

Inigo FitzGibbons was a short, thin man with stringy black hair and a narrow pinched face. A barbarian hero from the western continent, he had come to the Romany Empire seeking his wife. Right now he wore a sword on his right hip, thrust through a red sash worn over a patched brown jerkin and britches. Everyone called him Lurk.

The tailor seemed not to want to touch Lurk's hat(which had made his job rather difficult) but he was eager to get it out of his shop, so quickly repaired Lurk's hat, and passed it over quickly.

Lurk paid him, then popped the hat onto his head and looked at himself in the mirror. "Well now," he said with satisfaction. "Doesn't that look good?"

"I agree with you Lurk," Abraham said.

"You do?"

"Yeah. That doesn't look good." Abraham van Helsing was a scholar-turned-wandering swordsman. A Hitton from the Desolation of Balilael, he was tall with gray hair and clear gray eyes. He wore a heavy tunic of black wool belted over brown canvas trousers and old boots.

Lurk sighed. "Y'know, I'm tired of you guys complaining about my hat all the time."

"Tell you what," Rushell offered. "If you stop wearing it, we'll stop complaining about it."

Lurk turned away and saw Heather standing in the doorway.

Heather was a werehuman, but she looked attractive for all that. She had pale white skin and a build that drew one's eye to all the right curves. Her silky, straight, neck-length hair was the color of coffee with cream, and was worn in a severe, simple style.

Right now she stared at Lurk with a very worried look in her wide orange eyes. "Heather!" he said cheerfully. "How are you doing?"

"I'm fine," she said softly. "Lurk, there is something very important I need to tell you."

"Okay. . ." Lurk said, getting worried. "What's wrong?"

"Lurk," she said carefully. "Stay calm, don't panic. There is something eating your head."

Check it out!

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/search.ep?keyWords=lurk&contributorId=242500&sorter=publicationDate-desc>

THE DAY THE LAWN GNOME CAME BACK PART 3 (BECAUSE SHIT'S ABOUT TO GET REAL)

Justin Hillis
of heavymokebishop@yahoo.com

Disclaimer: Believe it or not, I'm not in the mood for a silly disclaimer. If you're actually reading this, you know you're here for the story. Start scrolling down right about.....now. Seriously. :P

ON THE LAST EXCITING EPISODE OF TDTLWCB!

We finally got to meet The Beast, a poor-shit-faced motherfucker who's down on his luck, thanks to THE AGENCY. Burgerstein shows up to ask for help, and is introduced to all the other bar dwellers. Beast agrees to help, but only because it's Burgerstein asking. Just then, THE LAWN GNOME attacked. Now, only Beast, Burgerstein, and the Bartender can prevent New Pork City from being nearly destroyed again...I think.

"Po-tae-toes." The Lawn Gnome spoke.

"Jeopardy!" The Beast retorted.

"What? We all know Wheel of Fortune is better!" The Bartender yelled.

"Jeopardy!"

"Wheel of Fortune!"

"Po-tae-toeeees!"

"Shut up you stupid Gnome! This is an argument between manly men! Don't bring your stupid "Millionaire" game show into this!"

The Lawn Gnome's eyes widened in shock, and thrust himself

head-first into the Beast's stomach. The Bartender backed off as Beast recoiled, and began throwing fisticuffs. The Lawn Gnome had evidently trained in the Veggie-trix, as he dodged each punch with time to spare. What he didn't count on was Beast kicking him in the head with the heel of his military boots.

This sent the Lawn Gnome flying, and he landed face-first on the concrete. He got up, slowly, and noticed a light pole on the ground next to him. He picked it up, and swung it at Beast. Beast took it to the face, and shook it off with some effort.

“So, that's how you wanna play? With toys? Then allow me.”

Beast picked up a car, and tossed it at the Gnome. The Lawn Gnome responded by hitting the car with said light pole, and sending the car back to Beast. The mountain of muscle countered by punching the car back to the Gnome. The Gnome countered the counter by unleashing a Liu Kang-esque flying kick to the car (complete with really bad bruce lee imitation in the vocal form of “POOOOEEEE!”) right into Beast's stomach.

Beast took the shot hard, but got himself back in the fight by ripping the car in half, right down the middle. He barely saw the Lawn Gnome come flying at him, spinning his pointed hat like a drill. He almost didn't dodge it, but took a grazing wound to the head. He then took a kick to the face with both feet, and fell upon his back. It was then...he noticed a can on the ground. He squinted at it; he knew this can. This can had empowered Corn Dogg...it was...

THE CAN OF CONCENTRATION!

He rolled out of the way from another hat-drill and scooped up the can. He stared at the label; it said Concentrate. He did just that; staring at the label, concentrating as hard as he could.

And he felt....nothing. He stared in disbelief, then he turned his attention to the Lawn Gnome, who was waiting for him patiently.

“... You...you did it, didn't you?” he asked.

“Po-tae-toes....” The Lawn Gnome replied.

“You greedy bastard! You drained the Can of it's powers?! Do you realize how many innocent young boy's dreams will be shattered thanks to that? Do you know how much effort and willpower went into

making this thing?!”

“Po-tae-toes.”

“Screw you, Gnome, and your attitude! Yes this thing helps dreams come true! It makes the impossible possible! Son-of-a-bitch! It’s because of bullshit like this that Corn Dogg is in an in-escapable worm hole! It’s like the first few chapters of this god-forsaken series!”

“Po-tae-toes!”

“That’s it; you’ve pissed off Mt. Man-Muscle for the last time! RAAAAAAAAHHH!”

With that battle cry, Beast rushed the Gnome. The Gnome rushed Beast. Beast hit the Gnome with a lariat. The Gnome hit a double-foot to the chest on Beast, then dodged a second lariat. Beast knew he was screwed if he didn’t manage to mount an offensive on the Gnome, but he was too damn fast. The Gnome had dodged most of Beast’s attacks, and that was only made clearer when Beast threw an array of punches and kicks, ala DBZ, and the Gnome dodged them all, ala DBZ again. It was then that Beast noticed them: The Lawn Gnome was wearing earbuds. He knew immediately what song was playing; it was the song that only served to increase the battle strength of the Lawn Gnome....The Ramones’ “Blitzkrieg Bop”.

That sorry son-of-a-bitch, he has stacked the deck in his favor...first he drains the Can of Concentration of it’s powers, then he turns on the one song that can make him nearly unbeatable in battle...what a clever bastard.

Those words ran through Beast’s head as he got assaulted by the super-powered golden Lawn Gnome. He might have lost the fight there if he hadn’t spotted 4 rockets speeding towards the Gnome. They slammed hard into the Gnome’s back, and that allowed The Beast to get away for the moment.

The Lawn Gnome recovered and looked in the direction of where the rockets had come from; the Bartender had both of his rocket launchers out. The normally creepy-happy look on the Gnome’s face turned to one of annoyance and anger.

“Po-tae-toes.”

“Do you really think I’m afraid of you? Please. I run a bar full of

sorry sacks of shit who can't seem to make it big because they're worthless. You're laughable, at most."

The Gnome's eyes became full of shock; someone actually wasn't afraid of him? Blasphemy! He was the Lawn Gnome! He was the MOTHERFUCKING LAWN GNOME!

"Yes, I know he's the motherfucking Lawn Gnome, and I don't give a damn. I'll take this bastard on, and look good doing it. So huzzah!" The Bartender assumed a battle stance to face off against the Lawn Gnome.

As much as I'm sure you'd love to see this fight, I think we need to check in on Beast. If you don't want to, fine, keep watching the Lawn Gnome and the Bartender destroy New Pork City. Hell, knowing how this is gonna go, about the only building left standing will be the freakin' bar.

Burgerstein, who's been in hiding most of this chapter, rushed to Beast's side, only to find him looking like shit.

"You look like shit." He said.

"Kiss my muscular ass, Doc."

"No thanks, you don't wanna know where that came from."

"Was it at least from a body-builder?"

"I forget."

"Ugh."

"That's what she said."

"...Shut up."

Burgerstein fished inside his lab coat, and produced a can. Beast looked at it with one squinty eye; it said RAWBERRY.

"...What the hell is that?"

"It will give you strength, and put your power up with the Gnome's. It will make you...well...you'll see."

Beast looked from the Doc, to the can, to the Doc, to the can. He then muttered, “aw, fuck it.” and took the can.

Meanwhile, back at the Battle Scene, The Gnome looked like shit. His drill hat was gone, his face was crushed and mangled, and his clothes were torched. The Bartender was missing an eye, but that was it. Other than that, he was mostly intact. Oh, he was out of ammo, too. Yet he stood tall, and the Gnome was getting his ass kicked.

While I was away dealing with The Beast, The Lawn Gnome had realized merely using the earbuds wasn't working, so he summoned his giant boom box and began playing “Blitzkrieg Bop” once more. However, even this didn't help, as the Bartender still kicked his ass.

Go figure they went to town, destroying most of the area. Rocket Launchers in a city? Bad idea. But you don't hear me say that.

Anyways, The Lawn Gnome began to charge up his ultimate attack, the Po-tae-toe-Po-tae-toe-TOE! Imagine his surprise when the Bartender tagged in The Beast. Beast popped his huge neck, and emptied the contents of the can Burgerstein gave him down his gullet. With one gulp, it disappeared down his throat.

Burgerstein's eyes widened as he saw the muscles on Beast explode with energy, and a silver glow emanated from The Beast.

“...Beast...how do you feel?”

“...How do I feel, doc? I feel...

UNCOMFORTABLY ENERGETIC!”

Cue an echo with that, folks.

The Lawn Gnome was not impressed; he fired the massive. earth-smashing beam anyways. What he didn't count on was Beast assumed a stance like he was going to catch the beam.

...Wait, what? Catch the beam? That's nuts! Everyone knows you can't catch a beam of energy.

But to everyone's surprise, Beast green-handed the beam, and followed that up with a German suplex.

YES PEOPLE. BEAST JUST PULLED A ZANGIEF TRIBUTE. (be glad he didn't try the Siberian Blizzard. Trust me on this; you won't have to drink yourself under the table in shock afterwards.)

Everything stopped; Beast had German suplexed an energy beam? Get out of here. Let's get everyone's reaction, shall we?

The Lawn Gnome: His eyes were bugging out of his head in shock and surprise in an "Oh shit, did he just do that?!" kinda look.

The Bartender: He merely applauded the extreme show of machismo, and absurdity that Idiot Riot is known for.

Burgerstein: See The Lawn Gnome.

And then we have the spec-oh, right. Forgot to mention that. Somewhere in the middle of the battle, bystanders began building bleachers on the sidewalks. Hey, it was a street fight, and people love street fights. (BEAT 'EM UP GUYS! GO FOR BROKE!)

(CAN ANYONE STOP THIS FIGHTING MACHINE?!)...ok, I'll stop.

Beast turned his attention to the giant boom box that was blasting The Ramones. He noticed The Lawn Gnome was too stunned to do much of anything, so he kicked it. The sound of a record getting scratched occurred, and the music stopped. Beast tossed a middle finger in the direction of his adversary.

"HA! HOW D'YA LIKE THEM APPLES, SONNIE?! I removed your music, and most of your power is gone now! I've got the advantage now!"

The Lawn Gnome finally regained his composure thanks to the rude gesture, and finally landed on the ground, ever so slowly. He had been in the air this entire time, after all.

"Po-tae-toes."

"...What? You haven't even used the Can's powers yet? Oh fuck."

"Po-tae-toes."

The Gnome became blindingly bright, his entire body covered in even more gold than before.

Thanks to the RAWBERRY, Beast still had plenty of power left, and matched up with The Gnome. The air was full of tension; they were fighting for all the marbles now. The sheer force of their auras were causing nearby buildings to crumble into rubble; not surprisingly, only the bar Malice remained standing.

“Damn right, it is!” yelled the Bartender.

It was then, right before they clashed, someone fell towards the boom box. A random bystander, he had tripped over nothing and pulled down on the play button as he tried to catch himself. It was then a familiar song began to play. Not anything by the Ramones, mind you..

Beast stopped; he knew this song. It was....Y.M.C.A. Beast looked like he was gonna hit someone out of annoyance(which he did) as the beginning lyrics started up.

Young man! There’s no need to feel down!

I said, Young man! Pick yourself off the ground!

Beast looked around at the others...and groaned.

“...Are you serious? Do we have to do this?”

Burgerstein spoke up. “Unfortunately, it seems so. I think this is how he wants to end this part of Idiot Riot.”

Shut up and dance, you idiots.

And dance they did, to the Y.M.C.A. !
For those curious, Beast formed the Y, Burgerstein the M, The Bartender the C, and the Lawn Gnome(Yes, even he has to dance.) formed the A.

Y.M.C.A- it’s fun to stay at the Y.M.C.A.-

Ok, while those idiots are dancing, because I said so, for those

who wanna know...yes, they did destroy half the city. Hell, Beast german-suplexing that energy beam annihilated most of the area (along with lots of people's minds.)

Also, for those curious about the guys in the bar...well...

The monsters made it big in Japan, with their breakout movie: Biggu Monstaa furomu Amerika in Japan! The movie was a huge success and within a week, action figures, t-shirts, all that crazy shit was being made. They were truly loved, for once in their lives.

Borin G. McOnion opened a museum about soybeans while he dedicated half of the profits to his best friend in the whole world's family. He also took up country music, and won an award for a song about Bubba. Then someone called him stupid and Borin broke a glass pane over the guy's head. Did he get in trouble for it? Not really. He is the former mayor of New Pork City, after all.

E-mperor-Gor tried to start an army of Sith, or rather, like-minded individuals, and attacked the Convention he was thrown out of. He was confronted by people posing as Jedi. A nerdgasm commenced.

Wolfman, with some coaching and help, became THE movie monster once more. His first movie back, The Wolfman's Back, Bitches! , won him six academy awards.

The Blob? Well, he got bigger...and bigger...and bigger. From what I hear, he terrorized some town in California. Why? Don't look at me. Think up your own reasons, dammit.

The Invisible Man tried to start an Invisible Gay Porn business, but he realized real quick that if people couldn't see what was happening, they wouldn't watch period. That business caved in, so he decided to haunt the men's rooms of various celebrities. Male, preferably.

Tyler, the poor bastard....he was just sitting around, sparkling like usual, when he got hit by a rock. Literally. After being hit by said rock, he was stuffed into a bag, and strung up from the ceiling of a nearby club to become the new disco ball for a gay rock troll bar. Yes, I said gay rock troll bar. The most popular song there was "Disco Inferno."

The Mummy continued with his horrible, horrible pick-up

lines until he knocked up a chick with a little mummy. He claimed he thought she was eighteen, when she was really sixteen. When the baby emerged from her covered in old bandages, you'd think they were holding an exorcism by how she screamed, complete with head spinning and everything. He later opened a nightclub called The Tomb.

E-lite-gor continued to act as Burgerstein's servant. He went ga-ga (no pun intended) over Lady Gaga's BTW album, and promptly put his paws up.

Burgerstein continued on with his mad scientist work, making his dreams a reality. He actually made a new type of tea, and bought a patent for it. So now, he's making money, and being a mad scientist. How do you like them apples?

Beast became a pro-wrestling star, living his dream, and won the WTF championship at WTF-Wrestlefest 30. He was a happy man, or rather, Beast.

TWO WORLDS, ONE LOVE

CHAPTER 1

Scott Fraser

Aurora Davis hid under her bed when the Enforcers came in her house at night. They trashed it completely and knocked everything over. They also flipped all the tables and beds. They seemed to be searching for something and apparently weren't leaving until they searched the whole place. Luckily, they didn't check a certain dark corner of a room in the front of the house.

She knew why they were there and she didn't like it. They were here because she stole a loaf of bread from a grocery store. It wasn't her fault that the emperor charged way too much for something even so simple. He charged a lot of money for everything so only he could have everything. Everyone else could die for all he cared. It really wasn't fair.

Her parents died when she was 10 and they were the rulers of this world. She was supposed to be the next one to rule. She would have made everything right and even remove herself as empress to bring rulers the people wanted or even didn't want. However, Arthus Slater told the elders that she couldn't rule because she was a female. There have been female rulers before, but not when there were possible male rulers. As a war hero, he was able to rule. So, he became ruler instead.

Aurora was wearing a light blue shirt and black jeans. She had pale skin and light blue eyes. She was an average height of 5ft.7 and was 18 years old. What made the Enforcers know it was her who stole the bread above everyone else was her hair which gave her her name. Her hair was light blue with red and purple streaks in it. Those she came across said she was beautiful, even the emperor himself. In fact, he actually wanted her for himself since she was the only thing that wasn't his and he also loved her. However, she didn't want him and he made her life a lot harder because of it.

The Enforcers were all in SWAT-like armor holding rifles with laser sights. They were only supposed to bring trouble-makers to the emperor, but they brought rifles just in case things got a little tougher for them. Aurora knew about the comparison because she read about the SWAT team in books written by those who were lucky enough to visit the alternate Earth. Only a select few were able to enter. The emperor would never allow her to. She knew that for sure. In fact,

she'd be lucky to even get a glimpse of the portal after her theft.

That thought gave her an idea. She had a power that no one else she knew had. She had the power to turn in to an eastern dragon. The kind that had legs and arms but with a long, somewhat small body. She had scales in that form instead of feathers like other eastern dragons she read about. She read that the alternate Earth had many werewolves who were humans that could turn in to feral and anthro wolves. She hoped she might be able to fit in with them.

She waited until the Enforcers left her room. Luckily they didn't see her while they searched. After they left the room, she shifted to her dragon shape. It was the same color as her hair and was 10ft. tall and 20ft. long from head to tail. She flew out of the house immediately after she changed. The Enforcers yelled behind her for her to come back. Like she would listen to them.

The world she lived in was different from the other Earth even in appearance. There were no real trees. Only fake ones built to breathe in carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen as well as provide home for animals. Pollution and lumberjacks destroyed the real trees and luckily, humans stopped polluting after that. The buildings were made of metal in her city but there were few areas where wood and rock houses still existed. Only rich people could live in them, though. The streets were also made of metal and instead of driving cars and trucks and the like, people walked, biked, or ran.

However, there were a few similarities between the two worlds. One of them was the roads were lit up at night with street lamps for those who wanted to go out at night or for Enforcers to go after troublesome fugitives while they slept. That's what they tried to do with her, but she was expecting them and was ready. She only hoped she could get away.

She knew exactly where the portal to the other Earth was. She studied it numerous times for this occasion should it ever occur. It was guarded in a warehouse-like area by different types of guards than Enforcers. She didn't know she would be going to the portal so soon and so unexpected. She always thought she'd do it in a time when the emperor himself was near and trying to take her or something. This, at least, would throw the Enforcers for a loop.

As she neared the portal, the guards protecting it fired at her. They had normal pistols since they did not know about her power. The bullets bounced off her scales and she rammed through the gate

separating her from the portal. She was going to make it without a problem! At least, that's what it seemed like at first.

As she broke through the gate and headed to the portal, sirens went off. Guards carrying rocket guns and lasers came out and started firing. She knew those would hurt and dodged as much as she could while still going for the portal. However, some shots got lucky and before she knew it, she had huge holes in her. With the little strength she had left, she made it through the portal.

When she broke through, she first realized that it was night time in this world also. She also realized just how different the Earths were. She saw many trees and knew right away they were real from their appearance. She also saw many wood and rock houses and rocky streets and cars. She knew that meant pollution was still around, but she was glad it still wasn't as bad as it was in her world before it stopped.

She still couldn't believe she made it. She knew it would be tough to get in the portal and she was right. It felt like a dream to her to be there. She always wanted to escape her world and Arthus since he came in to power. She was so glad she survived the trip and was finally here. To her, any amount of pain was worth it.

Because of her wounds, she couldn't enjoy her success for long. She turned into her human self to heal. The change to either form helped heal any wounds she had. According to her research, the werewolves in this world were similar. There were legends of werewolves reverting to their human selves if they died. However, she read the truth was they stayed whatever formed they died in.

Her clothes magically came on her after she changed due to her magic. She didn't know how they did that and how they were always the same clothes she changed form in. However, she was glad they did appear. She was still very tired since changing when her body needed healing took a lot of energy so she moved under the trees to sleep. Her last thought before she slept was what would she do now and how would she live in this new world.

Logan Taylor was glad it was a Friday night. He loved his job as a construction worker, but it was really exhausting, even for a werewolf like him. However, he thankfully had the weekend ahead of him. It was his time to relax from all the loud noises and heavy lifting. Even

better was that the full moon was out tomorrow night.

Unlike in most stories, werewolves didn't become evil during the full moon. It's also not the only time they changed. They could change in to a feral or anthro wolf any time they wanted. During the full moon, however, they were forced to change in to one of those forms. It also made the change go by faster and more painlessly. During other nights, the change was somewhat painful to werewolves since their bones and muscles twist and change to those like wolves.

Logan himself had brown hair, pale skin, and green eyes. He stood at a pretty small size of 5ft.5 in his human form and was 20 years old. He didn't mind his small size at all. He could still do the jobs he needed to do and that was good enough for him. He also was still able to scare off thugs and most attackers.

He lived in a wonderful grey, stone house that was pretty far from other houses. He gave it a unique because he loved it. To him, a unique look was a kitchen with a stone counter in the middle of a few appliances. He had a refrigerator/freezer as well as a blender, stove, oven, and microwave. The stove and oven were of course together, but the other appliances were spread out a bit.

All the walls of the kitchen weren't painted or anything. They were bare, stone walls. Well, not really bare exactly. He had posters of wolves up as well as some personal pictures of him and his parents. He never had any siblings or friends so those kinds of pictures weren't there. That was because his parents left the pack with him after the alpha turned out to be evil.

The rest of Logan's house wasn't all that different. A lot of his furniture was made using stone. He made those himself since he was good at building stone objects. The beds, chairs, and couches, though, were of course not made from stones. Those he bought with his money after he moved in. It was the same with the TV.

Logan was excited about the full moon the next day. However, he wanted to do some running tonight out in the woods that started near some houses and a road. By running, he didn't mean as a human. He was planning on being a feral wolf tonight. He went outside and locked the door. He was sure no one was stupid enough to steal from him with the reputation he had and the fact that he lived far from other people. However, he knew he was better off safe than sorry.

After he made sure his house was locked and he was ok for a run

tonight, he headed for the woods. There was an entrance pretty close to where he lived so he got there quickly. He planned to get to his favorite spot near the road and rest then head back as he usually did. He didn't know there was someone already there. He also didn't know how she would change his life forever.

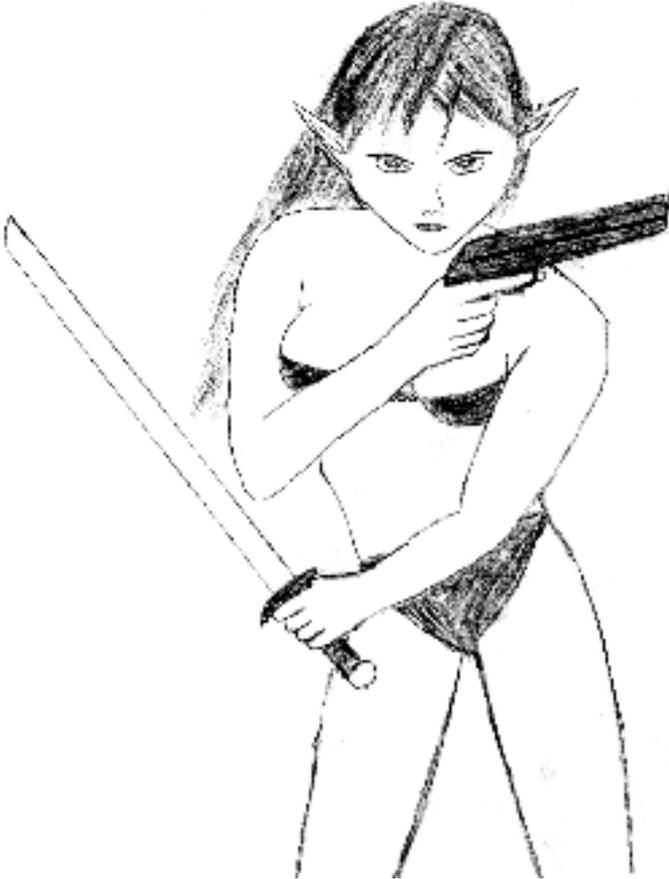
When he got to the woods, he shifted to his wolf form. Like Aurora and all the other werewolves, he was able to shift without worrying about his clothes. The shift was painful like usual, but Logan didn't mind. He knew the thrill of being a wolf and running as one will be worth the pain. He also shifted so many times, he knew every part of it.

His arms and legs popped as the bones became more canine and forced him to go on all fours. His hair became fur and he grew more fur to where it covered his body. He also grew a tail from the base of his spine. His ears became more canine and moved to the top of his head. His face extended a bit to become a muzzle and his nostrils became more canine and moved to face forward instead of down. The whole change lasted about 3 seconds. Long enough to where a human can see it, but short enough where the pain went away fast and a werewolf can run away or make sure a human doesn't tell anyone what they may have seen.

After the change was complete, Logan started his run. He loved the feel of the wind through his fur and the feeling of freedom. He also loved how wonderful the air felt in the woods. It made him feel so alive. It made him glad to be a werewolf. It also made running that much more fun for him.

After a half-hour or so, Logan neared his favorite spot. As he neared it, though, he smelled something another person. He knew some people liked to walk in the woods and enter in this way, so he walked over slowly making sure he didn't alarm whoever it was. When he got there, he didn't see anyone right away. He looked over toward where the scent was coming from and almost froze when he saw what was there.

FAN FICTION



or: Leanna's Return

Brought to you courtesy of Gunslinger, the wandering Vigilante.

Check it out: <http://www.lulu.com/shop/jb-hickock/gunslinger/ebook/product-18930890.html>

ME2 HELLDIVER SAGA CHAPTER 24

THE PRODIGAL

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Austin proceeded into Miranda's quarters. The Ex-Cerberus operative immediately took notice of him. Austin wasn't sure if he was correct, but something about Miranda seemed different this time.

"Lawson. EDI said you wanted to see me. What's this about?" he asked.

"Shepard, I find myself in the unpleasant position of asking for your help." Said Miranda. Rather surprisingly, he voice had emotion in it. Even a hint of nervousness. This was very unlike her.

"What do you mean? Is something wrong?" Austin asked sympathetically.

"I don't like discussing personal matters... but this is important." Said Miranda.

"It's okay, I'm listening. Just tell me what you need." Said Austin calmly.

"My father was extremely wealthy. He wanted the ideal daughter, and he paid a great deal to genetically tailor me. When I learned that my father was more interested in controlling a dynasty than raising a daughter, I left." Said Miranda.

"How did your father take that?" Austin asked.

"He was less than pleased. Several of his security guards were injured in the process. He knows not to come after me. But this isn't about me..." Miranda replied.

"I'm still not sure I fully understand though. You where genetically created?" Austin implied.

"It's a long story, Shepard. I'll gladly explain everything to you, but right now this has to be dealt with." said Miranda as she stood up from

her desk and walked in front of Austin. “I have a sister. A twin. And he’s still hunting her. Cerberus has kept her safe, but now that I no longer work for them, that’s stopped. She’s living a normal life on Illium, safe and hidden from my father.” She said.

“So, why are you sharing the family history with me?” Austin asked.

“My father’s agents have been searching for my sister for years. I believe they’ve tracked her to Illium. I’ve tried to keep her hidden, without impacting her life, but I’m out of options. Not to mention that my father has most likely convinced Cerberus to hand her over now that I’ve defected to your side.” Said Miranda. She then leant against her desk.

Austin had to do his best not to stare at Miranda’s behind that was sticking out, despite her new armour outfit.

“They’re too close. I need to relocate my sister and her family before it’s too late.” She said.

“What do you know about your sister?” Austin asked.

“She’s my genetic twin. We’re identical. But she deserves a normal life. And she’s going to get it, no matter what.” Miranda replied sternly.

“Does your sister’s family know about this? Are they okay with being relocated?” Austin asked.

“They know nothing. They’re completely uninvolved. Normal. Since Cerberus will no longer look after the family, I’ve told the Arkane Council. I didn’t think they’d help me at first, but they’ve agreed and are coming up with a positive reason to move the family. They’ve even said that they’ll handle her security from now on. I never thought I’d say this, but I think I can actually trust them.” Said Miranda.

“You’ll find that both the Arkanes and we Helldivers aren’t what Cerberus leads you to believe. Anyway, what do you need me to do? If it was that simple, I doubt you’d be telling me.” said Austin.

“My father is extremely persistent. I’d like to go to Illium when the Helldivers are moving the family to make sure none of his agents get too close. I would do it alone, but if the worst comes to pass... basically, I want you to come too. I know you may still not like me, and I know you’re squad don’t trust me either, but you’re the only person I

can trust now. You spared my life and Jacob's; I guess I owe you my trust." Said Miranda.

"I appreciate you telling me that. If that is what you wish, I won't disappoint. I've been meaning to go back to Ilium anyway." Said Austin.

"Thank you, Shepard. I appreciate you doing this. My contact's name is Lanteia. She'll be waiting for us in the lounge near the Nos Astra docking bay." Said Miranda.

Austin, Sarah, Miranda and Samara disembarked from the Normandy onto Nos Astra's docking bay once again. Austin comlink beeped and EDI's holographic avatar once again appeared out of his omni tool as she often did when contacting him and the others.

"I have a message for Ms Lawson, Shepard. Lanteia has reserved a room at Eternity and will be waiting." She said.

"Thank you, EDI." Said Miranda.

The group made their way to Eternity. Just before they entered the bar though, an Asari shouted at them.

"Hey, you! Yeah, you! You! Shepard!" she said angrily. She then walked right to Austin and went to punch him in the face.

"Don't..." Austin went to say, but he didn't say it fast enough.

The Asari's fist hit his helmet with a very loud clang. Naturally of course, the punch didn't hurt at all and Austin didn't feel a thing. All it did was knock his head to the side very slightly. The Asari on the other hand was not so lucky and she clutched her hand in pain.

"OW! FUCK, MY HAND! THINK I BROKE MY HAND!" she yelled.

"I did try to warn you. Now what the hell did you try to do that for?! I don't even know you!" said Austin.

"Like you don't know? Your friend came into my bar, harassed my people, and tried to get the deed to this place! That crap might fly on Omega, but Ilium has laws! I've got security feeds all over my bar!" said

the Asari crossly as she slowly tried to move her fingers again. Her hand wasn't broken, but she was still in extreme pain.

"My people are on my ship! He's obviously just some person trying to show off. Besides, if he's causing trouble just kick him out!" said Austin defiantly.

"I'm about to. And I suppose that's true, but I'm warning you right now. If you or your group bothers my people again, I'll have you arrested so fast you'll red shift on your way to the prison transport!" said the Asari.

"And if you try to hit my brother again, I'll hit you just as hard!" said Sarah defensively.

"Whatever!" said the Asari as she walked off.

"Wow. She was a bitch." Said Sarah.

"Still, if this so called person is causing trouble in your name, we should check out this bar, Shepard." Said Samara.

"I couldn't agree more. I'd hate to have to explain why that Asari broke her hand from trying to hit me again, or why Sarah gave her a black eye." Said Austin.

"What can I say? No one hits my brother and gets away with it." Sarah shrugged.

"We'll take care of your sister as soon as we've dealt with this, Miranda. I promise. Austin said to Miranda.

Miranda simply nodded in acknowledgement and the group proceeded into the bar. Things looked fine at first, but then they saw who was causing the trouble.

"I'm Commander Shepard's squad mate! Practically second-in-command! You don't want to mess with me!" he said to the Asari bartender. She didn't look afraid of him, in fact she seemed bored.

"Uh-huh." She said, obviously not caring what this man was saying.

"I'm going to save the galaxy! I don't have time for your crap!" he said again.

“Uh-huh.” The bartender repeated.

“Oh no.” Austin groaned. “Not him again.”

He recognized this man now. Even though he was now wearing a set of N7 armour, he was still recognizable as Austin’s old fan.

“That’s right! Anybody messing with me will answer to my good friend--” he said, he then turned and saw Austin. “Commander Shepard?”

“Hey, if you know this idiot, can you rein him in before I slap his ass with a singularity?” said the bartender.

“Shepard? Is it really you? It’s me, Conrad Verner! We met on the Citadel? I wanted to become a spectre?” said Conrad.

“Yes, I remember you.” Said Austin coldly. Conrad had been okay to chat to the first two times, but after the third and now this, it was now getting ridiculous.

“You’re alive! Oh, this is the happiest day of my life!” said Conrad happily.

“Is it really, Verner?” said Sarah as she came out from behind her brother.

“You? But...” Conrad stuttered.

“Let me make this perfectly clear.” Said Sarah as she grabbed Conrad and then kneed him very hard in the stomach. “This is unacceptable.”

Conrad slowly got back up, now clutching his stomach and trying to breathe again.

“Ha! Kick ‘em in the quad!” the bartender cheered.

“What?!” said Austin, rather surprised that an Asari would say something like that. In fact, that sort of comment sounded more like the sort of thing a Krogan would say.

“Sorry. My father was a Krogan.” She said.

That explained it.

“Man, I should’ve gotten better armour. That really hurts.” Conrad wheezed.

“That’s for trying to flirt with me 2 years ago, Conrad! You’re just lucky my brother’s here or I’d have shot you in the foot!” said Sarah crossly.

Austin was rather lost for words at this. He’d never seen Sarah this angry before.

“Get angry if you want, Sarah. But somebody had to do something. Your brother was dead, I stepped up.” Said Conrad defensively.

“You’ve been insulting his memory!” Sarah nearly shouted.

“Sarah, enough! Let me handle this.” Said Austin sternly as he put his hand on the N7 marine’s shoulder. Sarah reluctantly stepped back. “You tried to flirt with her?”

“Okay, okay, I had that coming. I’m sorry. But I’m so happy to see you; I don’t even mind that she hit me. Carrying on the work you started has been so hard, but I’ve tried to do what you would’ve wanted.” Said Conrad, his mood brightened now that he was talking to his hero again.

“In Alliance armour? You’re such an idiot. Speaking of which, how’d you get that armour? They stopped making that model a year ago.” Sarah asked.

“Oh, they make some pretty convincing replicas these days, if you’re willing to pay. I did try to get some Helldiver armour made, but it was simply impossible. So I felt instead that N7 armour would be the next closest thing. Getting the whole get up was really expensive, but my wife was really supportive. She even paid for my shuttle fair off world!” said Conrad.

Behind them, the Asari bartender groaned and rolled her eyes.

“Give me strength.” Austin mumbled under his breath. Even he could clearly see that Conrad’s wife had obviously done that in order to get rid of him. Mind you, he couldn’t say that he blamed her.

“Conrad, any decent security system will detect that you aren’t in the military much less part of my squad. Impersonation will only get you killed.” Said Austin.

“I just say that I’m deep-cover, don’t appear on systems, and don’t wear Helldiver armour. I’m doing the best I can, okay? You were a hero. You saved the galaxy and showed everyone what humanity and the Helldivers could do... and then you died! The galaxy needed someone like you, Shepard. We all did. I had to do something.” Said Conrad.

“Why were you trying to get the deed to this place?” Austin asked.

“This place is actually a front for a red sand dealer. I need to take it over to crack the ring!” Conrad replied, lowering his voice a bit.

“What? Who the hell told you that?” said the bartender.

“The owner of that weapons store near the carport! She’s an undercover cop! She told me about it when I introduced myself.” Conrad replied.

“Listen, crap-for-brains: first, we don’t sell red sand. Second, red sand is legal on Illium! You just need a license.” Said the bartender. It really did sound as though she’d had enough of Conrad now. Last thing Austin wanted was for things to get nasty.

“I’ll talk to this undercover cop and figure out what’s going on.” He said.

“Thank you. If I kill annoying customers, it usually causes property damage. That comes out of my pay.” Said the bartender.

“Just let me know if you need any help, Shepard!” said Conrad.

He walked off and sat at a nearby table. Everyone watched him go before the Asari bartender turned back to Austin.

“Thanks for taking care of that crazy guy. Saves me having to beat him to death with his own spine. Takes the other customers nervous.” she said. “Anyway, this is Eternity, and I’m Aethyta, Asari Matriarch and bartender. Get you anything?”

“You’re an Asari Matriarch? I thought Matriarchs served as honoured advisors.” Austin asked with surprise. He’d guessed the Asari was old, but he would never have guessed she was that old.

“Right. Which I do at this bar. I know, not what you’d expect. But nobody on Thessia wanted to listen to my wise counsel, so here I am.

My dad was a Krogan who fought in the Rachni Wars. My mother fought in the Krogan Rebellions. I've pretty much seen it all." Said Aethyta.

"Your mother fought in the Krogan Rebellions?" Austin asked.

"I don't know whether she "fought." She scouted, sniped a few people, and blew up a couple of space stations. You know, Commando stuff. She'd put the old commando leathers on for special nights with Dad. Goddess, that was embarrassing." Said Aethyta.

"You said your father fought in the Rachni Wars?" Austin inquired. He didn't know why, but it was interesting to hear this Matriarch's story.

"Yeah, when he was young. Loved showing off his war scars. Krogan think they're sexy. Me, I go for asses. When I was a girl, he'd tell me about landing on this poison-filled world and stomping a Rachni queen into muck. The scientists say all that stuff about us getting genetic material from the father is crap. Seems I got a bit of his mouth, though." Said Aethyta.

"If your mother fought in the Rebellions and your father was a Krogan, didn't that cause tension?" Austin asked.

"They didn't meet until a few hundred years after the Turians put the boot in with the damn Genophage. As far as either one knew, they were both just warriors. Dad boasted, Mom stayed quiet. Mom was a Matriarch herself, and Dad was near-on a thousand, when the truth came out." Said Aethyta.

"What happened when he did find out?" Austin asked.

"I was about a hundred, shaking my ass in some sleazy bar. They got me on the link, told me that they were going to have it out, and made me promise to love whichever one survived. Turned out to be damn easy, since neither one did. Family, huh? What a kick in the quad." Said Aethyta.

"Why is a Matriarch in a bar serving drinks?" Austin asked.

"It's better than what most other Matriarchs are doing. Look at that screw-up with Saren and his Geth a few years back! Their ships were hanging bare-assed in space when Saren started shooting. If not for you Helldivers, we would've bought it right there. And I warned them! Told people on Thessia what was coming, and they didn't want to

hear it.” Said Aethyta.

“What didn’t they want to hear?” Austin asked.

“That art and philosophy and political prowess wasn’t going to cut it. We can’t go a single Asari lifetime without some big war breaking out. We need to get our daughters working earlier, not spending their wild maiden years stripping or in merc bands. When I started talking about making new Mass Relays ourselves, they laughed the blue off my ass. So now I serve drinks.” Said Aethyta.

“Thanks for telling me about that.” Said Austin.

“That’s what I’m here for, babe. Get you anything else?” said Aethyta.

“No thanks. I’m fine.” Said Austin.

“Right. Don’t eat the nuts in the red bowls. They’re for Turians and Quarrians. You’ll get cramps.” Said Aethyta.

The team made their way to the weapons kiosk that Conrad had mentioned. The merchant was an Asari.

“Can I help you with something?” she asked.

“I talked to an old friend, Conrad Verner. You told him that the Eternity lounge was selling red sand.” Said Austin.

“Oh, you’re Conrad’s friend. Yes, that place is really dangerous. I should know. I’m an undercover cop. Did you get me the deed to the bar? I need the deed to, uh, stop the red sand dealers.” Said the merchant.

“That bar doesn’t have any red sand dealers! What are you trying to pull!” said Austin. Unlike Conrad, he knew a lie when he saw it. All that Helldiver training he’d used for over 14 years wasn’t going to waste now.

“Oh. So you’re not as dumb as your friend. Well, it was worth a shot. I’ll be going now. And lest you get angry, you should know that this whole place is under video surveillance. Mandatory for weapons sales.” Said the merchant.

“You think you can threaten another business and get away with it?” said Austin.

“I didn’t threaten anybody. Your human friend did. It’s not my fault if he misunderstood me when I talked about red sand dealers. And my surveillance cams had an unfortunate malfunction while I told him about the situation.” Said the Asari slyly.

“Now that we all know where we stand, why don’t you go take over your new bar? They’re ready to hand over the deed.” Said Austin.

“You expect me to believe that you’re going to help me?” said the merchant suspiciously.

“Why wouldn’t I? You get what you want, and I get a nice discount, right? Good business for everyone.” Said Austin. He had to admit this was a clever plan he’d managed to think up.

“For a human, you’re pretty smart. So what do we do now?” the Asari asked.

“Go in, be tough. They’ll hand the deed right over.” Said Austin.

“Well... great. Here, I’ll set you up for a discount. Thanks for the help.” Said the merchant as she gave Austin a discount and then left for the bar.

Once she was out of earshot, Sarah spoke up.

“Devious, brother. Very devious.” She said.

“I am glad though that you are bringing her to justice.” Said Samara.

“Exactly. When she arrives at that bar, she’ll be in prison before she can say Goddess.” Said Austin.

Sure enough, as soon as they entered the bar again, there was the merchant being interrogated by a security guard and the bar’s owner who had tried to punch Austin earlier.

“Damn it! This is just a misunderstanding!” she said.

“Tell it to the judge. My surveillance vid caught your extortion attempt

from four different angles.” Said the bar’s owner.

“I was misled! I was told that you had agreed to sell!” said the Asari, trying to prove she was innocent. Naturally of course, she was unsuccessful.

“Take her away, before I have my bartender throw her out.” Said the owner.

The security officer marched the merchant away and the bar’s owner left too.

Austin and the others walked up to Conrad.

“What happened? The undercover cop from the weapons kiosk just got arrested. He asked.

“She wasn’t a cop. She was using you to try to take over this bar.” Said Austin.

“What? No! But she said... But she was pretty! And blue! She wanted to get coffee! And she smiled when she said “coffee!” I’m pretty sure it was euphemism! I screwed this up, didn’t I? I screw everything up. Damn it! I’m so stupid! Who was I to think I could do what you do?” said Conrad. Who sounded as though he’d just failed to impress a girlfriend.

“You did fine. Thanks for holding the reins while I was gone. It’s good to know that someone cared.” Said Austin reassuringly.

“Really?” Conrad asked in surprise.

“Really. You did a good job, Conrad. Now please, go home. Let me take it from here.” Said Austin.

“Can do, Shepard. And thanks. It’s really good to have you back.” Conrad smiled as he left.

Now that they’d taken care of that, they could now do what they’d come here to do. Miranda’s Asari contact, Lanteia was in a separate room of the club.

“Ms Lawson, I’m glad you made it. We’ve had a complication.” She said.

“What happened? Is Oriana alright?” Miranda asked in worry.

“She’s fine. But... you listed a man named Niket as your trusted source? He contacted me, warning that your father has sent Eclipse mercenaries to make a sweep. He suggested that the mercs might be watching for you personally. He’s offered to escort Oriana’s family to the terminal instead.” Lanteia explained.

“You didn’t mention anything about Niket.” Said Austin.

“He’s a friend. He and I go back a long way...” said Miranda.

“Do you want to bring in any of your other Illium contacts, Ms Lawson?” Lanteia asked.

“No. You and Niket are the only two I trust on this.” Said Miranda.

“It’s your sister, Miranda. What do you want to do?” Austin asked.

“Lanteia, we’ll follow Niket’s suggestion. Shepard and I will take the car and draw their attention. Have Niket escort the family to the shuttle. Give him full access to the family’s itinerary, just to be safe.” Said Miranda.

“Understood, Ms Lawson.” Lanteia acknowledged.

“So the plan is for us to get shot down by Eclipse while your sister gets to safety?” Austin asked.

“Eclipse will be under orders to take my sister alive. They won’t risk anything that could kill us.” Said Miranda.

“I doubt Eclipse will send all their people just to stop you. Do you want to give Niket any backup?” Austin asked.

“Niket can take care of himself. Besides, any armed backup just draws attention to him.” Miranda replied.

“I’m ready whenever you are, Miranda.” Said Austin.

“Thank you, Shepard. I appreciate this. I hadn’t planned on Eclipse... but they never planned on you.” Miranda smiled.

They took a hover car to the cargo terminal of the spaceport. Most likely that was where the Eclipse mercenaries would start. Austin had swapped Sarah for Jack for this mission. They'd most likely need her biotics for this.

"Damn it!" said Miranda as she noticed something.

Austin looked out of the window and saw what Miranda had.

"Eclipse mercenary gunships. They'll be dropping troopers in the cargo areas."

Sure enough, two gunships flew down into the cargo areas and started to deploy their troops.

"Put us down in that cover behind them." Said Austin.

"Let's hope they really do want to take us alive." Said Miranda as she steered the car towards them. The Eclipse mercs saw them and opened fire on the car.

As they did however, the merc leader noticed Miranda.

"Hold fire. I said hold fire, damn it!" he ordered.

The mercs stopped firing and the car crashed where Miranda had intended for it to crash. Everyone immediately got out.

"I got this." Said the merc leader as the other Eclipse mercs readied their weapons for a fight.

"Since you're not firing yet, I trust you know who I am." Said Miranda.

"Yeah. They said you'd be in the car. You're the bitch that kidnapped our boss' little girl." Said the leader.

"Kidnapped? This doesn't involve you. I suggest you take your men and go." Said Miranda defiantly.

"Think you've got it all line up, huh? Captain Enyala's already moving in on the kid. She knows about Niket. He won't be helping you." Said leader.

"What do you mean, Niket won't be helping us?" Austin asked.

“Nothing you need to worry about. Nobody’s going to get killed unless you do something stupid. You walk away now, the girl goes back to her father, and everybody’s happy.” Said the leader.

“Everybody but my sister... and me.” Said Miranda.

“I’m only gonna say this once Eclipse. Get lost now! You’re not getting Miranda’s sister. If you push this, it’ll go badly for you.” Austin ordered.

Of course the merc leader wasn’t intimidated by this and simply folded his arms.

“Captain Enyala ordered us to give you one chance to walk away. But this whole time we’ve been talking, my men have been lining up shots.”

Sur enough, Austin could see some more mercs further away. Austin looked at Miranda, she saw it too. A large tank of fuel was being moved overhead. A few well-placed shots could unleash hell on them.

“When I say the word, we unleash hell on your squad. So I suggest you walk away nicely, unless you want...”

But before he could finish, Austin grabbed his neck and twisted it violently. His neck broke instantly.

“Shut up!”

Both Miranda and Jack fired on the other mercs while Austin activated his plasma cannon and he fired at the tank.

It took a few shots, but the tank was quickly dislodged from the crane that was carrying it and it exploded as it hit the ground.

“Come on! We need to get to Niket!” said Miranda.

The team quickly made their way over to a nearby elevator that could take them to the next part of the cargo terminal. As Austin opened the door, he suddenly heard a voice coming from a nearby radio that one of the mercs had dropped.

“Team four, do you read? Team four!” it said.

Miranda walked over to the radio and bent down to pick it up. Once again, Austin had to avert his gaze so that he wasn't staring at Miranda's ass.

“Hang on. I've got one of their radios. I'll patch us in; see if I can get an idea what we're up against. Shepard... I think I owe you an explanation. Oriana is my twin, genetically. But my father... grew her when I was a teenager. She was meant to replace me. I couldn't let my father do to her what he did to me. So I rescued her. She's almost a woman now.” She said.

“Why didn't you tell me we were saving a kid?” Austin asked.

“She's not a child; she'll be 19 this year. But... well, it didn't seem relevant at the time, I suppose.” Said Miranda. “There are people who'd use her against me. I'm very protective when it comes to Oriana. I'm sorry I didn't trust you sooner. You deserved to know.”

“I can understand choosing to go your own way, but you stole a young child from her father.” Said Austin.

“If you knew my father like I did, you would understand. I wasn't the first one he made. I was the first one he kept. I was brought up with no friends, pushed to meet impossible demands. I wasn't a daughter to him. I was... I don't know what I was. Oriana has had a normal life. I made the right decision.” Said Miranda.

“If Eclipse knows where Oriana is, they'll be moving in on her soon. We need to hurry.” Said Austin as they all proceeded into the elevator.

“Agreed. I'm a bit worried by what the merc said. If they've got to Niket somehow, this is going to be harder than I'd planned. According to the specs I reviewed, we'll need to cut through the cargo processing yard to get to Oriana.” Said Miranda.

“I hope your friend can be trusted.” Said Austin.

“Absolutely. Niket is one of my oldest friends. I guess you could say he was my only real friend. He's the only person I didn't cut ties with when I left my father.” Miranda smiled.

“Is there a chance your father could be using Niket to get to you?”

Austin asked.

“I’m sure he’s tried, but Niket’s one of the few people who understands what my father is really like. I trusted him with my life when I ran from my father, Shepard. He won’t betray me now.” Said Miranda.

“Let’s go find Niket and Oriana.” Said Austin.

“Right.” Said Miranda.

Austin pressed the button and the elevator began its journey.

“They’re on the far side of the conveyor line. Time your shots!” said Miranda as she saw the Eclipse merc in the distance.

Austin quickly swapped his M-76 Revenant for his M-13 Raptor as he went into cover. He was further away than the others were since he could now easily land shots on them from a distance.

The Eclipse mercs fired upon the group but the consistency of the cargo line bringing in a new crate every few seconds was making it difficult for them.

“This is Enyala! Keep the bitch back! Niket is nearing the transport terminal!” they heard a female voice over the radio as the mercs bombarded them with gunfire. Jack, Samara and Miranda were quick to put their biotics to use and the mercs quickly lost their own.

Austin meanwhile still remained in cover and managed to snipe two more engineers before they deployed their combat drones.

“Right between the eyes.” He smiled as he managed to headshot another trooper.

They were clear for now, but no doubt there would be more later on.

Sure enough, more mercs were present in the cargo areas, but it was nothing they couldn’t handle. Miranda in particular wasn’t letting up. Her sister’s safety was at stake after all.

“Divert everyone except my guard from Niket. I’ll handle him and the kid personally.” Said Enyala.

“Damn it! I’m not letting her get Oriana!” Miranda shouted as she ran ahead. “We can cut down through the cargo line!”

The team did so and stuck close as they gunned down Eclipse merc after Eclipse merc. It did give Austin the opportunity that to teach the others to use diamond formation, a technique that he and Alpha Squad had perfected over the years. Basically, it was as it sounded. All team members would band together in the shape of a diamond and slowly make their way through the battlefield and shoot. It was very effective. So effective in fact that none of their side had ever been injured or killed doing it.

Having biotics was also rather helpful since they were able to create biotic fields to serve as shields. After nearly several minutes, they reached the elevator that would take them to the final part of the cargo bay. Niket would most likely be there.

“Eclipse operatives have attempted to delay you by disabling the elevators. I am overriding their lockdown.” Said EDI.

More Eclipse mercs appeared out of the elevator and started attacking. As usual though, they didn’t put up much of a fight that was too tough for them.

“Niket has reached the terminal. He’ll switch the family over to our transport.” Said Enyala.

“Niket? But... that can’t be right...” said Miranda. “Maybe the Captain knows we’re listening in and she’s feeding misinformation about Niket making a switch.” “Or maybe it means something else. Niket wouldn’t do that.”

Miranda’s irritation grew when she noticed how slow the elevator was being. “Damn it, why won’t this thing go any faster?!”

She smashed the control panel and the hologram of the lift started speeding up.

“What makes you so sure that Niket wouldn’t turn on you? Not everyone in this galaxy can be as trustworthy as they seem. I of all people should know.” Said Austin.

“He could’ve turned on me when I ran away. I’m sure my father tried to buy him off. If he didn’t do it then, why would he do it now?” said

Miranda.

“Did Niket know that you took Oriana from your father?” Austin asked.

“No, he just found out about that recently. It was too personal to involve someone else. I never really thought about it, but maybe... no. He’d have to understand why I did it. He knows what I went through.” Said Miranda.

“We won’t know anything until we find Niket.” Said Austin.

“And then I’ll have a word with this Captain Enyala.” Said Miranda coldly.

“Listen to me; I’ve got authorization to change their booking!” said Niket as he argued with the Asari docking administrator.

“I’m sorry, sir. We’re under security lockdown. Until the situation in the cargo terminal is resolved, no passengers can be rebooked.” Said the Asari.

Sat next to Niket on a crate was Captain Enyala.

“This isn’t worth my time, Niket. I get paid regardless of how the girl gets there.” She said.

“No! I was told that I could handle this my way. We’re not traumatizing the family any more than we --”

But Niket was interrupted when the nearby elevator door opened and Austin, Miranda, Jack and Samara all stepped out.

“Miri.”

“This should be fun.” Said Enyala as she unholstered her claymore shotgun and pointed it at the group.

The docking administrator ran away in fright, but she didn’t get far before she was shot down by Enyala.

“Niket. You sold me out.” Said Miranda coldly.

“How do you want to handle this, Miranda?” Austin asked as he and the others unholstered their weapons too.

“Why, Niket? You were my friend. You helped me get away from my father.” Said Miranda.

“Yes! Because you wanted to leave. That was your choice! But if I’d known that you’d stolen a baby--” said Niket.

“I didn’t steal her! I rescued her!” Miranda interrupted.

“From a life of wealth and happiness? You weren’t saving her! You were getting back at your father!” said Niket.

“So, how did Miranda’s father turn you? Convince you to stab your own friend in the back?!” Austin asked coldly.

“They told me you’d kidnapped your baby sister all those years ago. They said I could help get her back peacefully. No trauma to the family. I told them you’d never do that. That they could go to hell. Then you finally told me what you’d done. I called them back that night.” Said Niket.

“Why didn’t you call me, Niket? We’ve been through a lot. You could’ve at least let me explain.” Said Miranda.

“I deserved to know that you’d stolen your sister, Miri. I deserved to know that you used to be with Cerberus. But I had to hear it from your father first.” Niket replied.

“How much did Miranda’s father pay you, bastard?” Austin retaliated.

“A great deal.” Niket replied.

“Damn it, Niket! You were the only one I trusted from that life.” Said Miranda furiously.

“He knew you felt that way. That’s why he bought me.” Said Niket.

“So you just his money. You’re no better than he is.” Miranda snarled.

“Don’t get holy with me, Miri. You took his money for years.” Niket retorted.

“Bastard.” Said Austin. “Whether or not you agree with Miranda,

Oriana has been with her family for years now.”

“Her father can still give her a better life.” Said Niket.

“A life she doesn’t want. You don’t know what my father wants for her.” Said Miranda.

“I know I’ve been poor, Miri. I didn’t much care for it.”

“He wants to take a girl away from the only family she’s ever know! Doesn’t that tell you what he really is?”

“It’s obvious he’s not gonna listen, Miranda.” Said Austin.

“I knew Eclipse was willing to get their hands dirty, but kidnapping a kid is below you.” Said Samara.

“I’m not stealing her, Justicar. I’m rescuing her. Besides, this doesn’t concern you or this Helldiver.” Enyala replied. “Come on, Niket. Let’s finish this bitch off and get out of here.”

“Take your best shot.” Miranda taunted.

“I was just waiting for you to finish getting dressed. Or does this Helldiver really let you whore around in that outfit?” Enyala replied back bitterly.

“I like her. Are we still recruiting?” said Jack as she fired a shot at one of the mercs.

“If Niket’s working for your father, that means he knows about Oriana. We need to find a new solution.” Said Austin.

“Miranda’s father has no information about Oriana. I knew you had spy programs in your father’s system, Miri, so I kept it private. I’m the only one who knows.” Said Niket.

“Which means you’re the only loose end. This isn’t how I wanted it to end, Niket.” Said Miranda as she aimed her gun at Niket. Before she could fire however, Austin grabbed her wrist.

“Miranda, wait! You don’t want to do this.” He said.

“This has to end here, Shepard. My father will keep trying to find Oriana.” Said Miranda.

“Maybe Niket can help... talk to your father. Just say you got here first...” Austin suggested.

“I’ll... I’ll tell him that you hid her. That I don’t know where she is.” Said Niket.

“I never want to see you again, Nik--”

But before Miranda could finish, Enyala shot Niket right in the back. At point black range, he died instantly.

“Done. Now if you don’t mind, I have a shipment to deliver.” She said.

Miranda snapped at that. She activated her biotics and hauled Enyala up into the air.

“You’ll die for that, bitch!” she shouted.

She threw a warp at Enyala and the Asari was sent flying. As she landed again however, she got back up, shotgun at the ready.

The whole place became a small war zone of biotics and gunfire as the team battled their way through Enyala’s troops.

As the small battle raged, Austin found himself face to face with Enyala. Both opponents aimed at one another and pulled their triggers, but both guns simply clicked. In all the commotion, they’d forgotten to put fresh clips in.

“Shit!” Enyala swore.

“Give it up, Enyala. It’s over.” Said Austin.

“Nothing’s over while I’m still breathing!” Enyala retorted.

“I was hoping you’d say that.” Said Austin.

The two opponents charged at one another. Enyala swung at Austin, using the butt of her shotgun as a club. Austin just in time managed to bring his Revenant up in time to block the attack.

This had to be one of Austin’s most bizarre fights. Using assault rifles as clubs and clashing with one another. Still, Austin’s fencing training and quick reflexes did help in some way. However, the Helldiver

didn't count on Enyala using her biotics and her next biotically charged attack knocked his rifle right out of his hands.

Austin and Enyala wrestled violently with one another before the Asari managed to trip Austin up. Enyala brought the butt of her weapon down but Austin just managed to block it with his wrist.

"I know what you're thinking." Austin groaned as he kept pushing against Enyala. "You're thinking I have to have both my arms to use my weapons.

Enyala's grin of victory was quickly wiped from her face when she saw Austin's shoulder cannon whirl into life and its targeting laser locked onto her forehead.

"Guess again... Captain." Austin smiled sneakily under his helmet.

Enyala only had seconds to realise what was about to happen before the plasma shot right out of the cannon and her whole head completely exploded and an awfully bloody mess. Austin gently pushed the headless body off of him and gently got up. Jack, Miranda and Samara had dealt with the rest of Enyala's troops.

"There could be more Eclipse mercs near the shuttle. I want to make sure Oriana and her family get on safely." Said Miranda.

The group made their way to the elevator. As Samara activated it, Austin noticed some sort of locket. He picked it up and examined it. The locket had a picture of an Asari and a human man. It didn't look expensive, but Austin did feel as though it likely held sentimental value.

"Shepard." Samara called.

Austin put the locket into one of the pouches on his combat belt and joined the others.

"I can't believe Niket sold me out. I didn't even see it coming." Said Miranda.

"Even with all your upgrades, you're human just like the rest of us." Said Austin reassuringly.

"But I let it get personal... and I screwed up. Why didn't you let me kill him? I could've handled that. But watching him get gunned down

by that Asari bitch...” said Miranda.

“You still cared for him, even if he betrayed you.” Said Austin.

“You’re right. And my father knew it. He used that against me. It’s always been like this. My father gave me anything I ever wanted, but there was always a hook, an angle for his long-term plan. I threw away everything he ever gave me when I ran. Except Niket. Weakness on my part.” Said Miranda.

“You can’t toss aside everything you care about just to be safe.” Said Austin.

“It’s okay, Shepard. My father hurt me, but he didn’t break me. As much as he tried to turn me into exactly what he wanted... I’m my own person.” Said Miranda.

“Any other old friends your father might use against you?” Austin asked.

“No. I cut ties with everyone else. And anyone I was close to in Cerberus is the enemy as far as I’m concerned. Only Jacob’s left and he now works for you. My father’s powerful, but he won’t dare cross you and the Arkane Council. He’d be signing his own death sentence.” Miranda replied.

“You still have Oriana.” Said Austin.

“My father didn’t give her to me. I rescued her. But... yes. You’re right. I still have something. Thank you.” Miranda seemed to smile.

Soon they were now at the docking bay.

“No sign of Eclipse. It looks like we’re clear.” Said Miranda.

Then she saw her sister. True to what Miranda had said, she and Oriana were indeed identical. A few small differences though were that Oriana had shorter hair than her sister and Miranda most likely had a more matured body. Oriana was also younger than Miranda was. Considering that she was only 19, this wasn’t surprising.

Present with her was her family. Her mother and father.

“There she is. She’s safe... with her family.” Miranda smiled. At the same time though, she sounded sad. Most likely that was because she’d never met her. “Come on. We should go.”

“Don’t you even want to say hello?” Austin asked.

“It’s not about what I want. It’s about what’s right for her. The less she knows about me, the better. She’s got a family. A life. I’ll just complicate that for her.” Said Miranda sadly.

At first, Austin felt it best to comply with what Miranda wanted, but at the same time he felt as though Miranda should talk to her. He then also came up with a very good way to encourage Miranda.

“She doesn’t need any details, but would it really be so bad for her to know she has a sister who loves her?” he asked, smiling under his helmet as he did so.

“I guess not...” Miranda smiled. She looked like she might cry with joy.

Austin simply smiled. This felt very right to him and he could tell that Samara seemed to feel the same way too since she was also smiling. Jack on the other hand didn’t care, but that didn’t really matter.

“Go on... We’ll wait here.” Said Austin.

Miranda nodded and slowly went up to Oriana.

“You have a kind heart, Shepard.” Samara smiled as she and Austin watched Miranda talk with her sister.

“Thank you, Samara.” Austin smiled.

“Don’t start getting soft on us, Shepard.” Jack teased.

Several minutes passed before Miranda finally came back and they proceeded back into the elevator. Oriana watched her sister go, smiling as she did. Miranda also smiled back and Austin was sure he could see Miranda’s eyes watering with joy. The door closed and Samara put her hand on Miranda’s shoulder.

Now that Miranda's sister had been taken care of, Austin's till had some business to finish off with Xun. Austin left Miranda, Jack and Samara outside the information broker's office as he walked in. The Chinese Helldiver took notice of her old friend.

"Shepard. Good to see you again." She said as she indicated for Austin to have a seat. Austin did so and sat down.

"Thank you for getting me that system data. Here." Said Xun as she handed Austin a small sum of credits. "I know it's not much, but I'm sure it will help you somehow on your mission. Do you remember the Shadow Broker? With the data you got me, I may be able to find information caches from his agents."

"You're not on the run from the Shadow are you?" Austin asked concernedly.

"Actually, it would be fairer to say that the Shadow Broker is on the run from me. Not long after you died, he started to interfere with a lot of our operations. Eventually, I and the Arkane Council decided we'd had enough. Since then, I've been working to take him down. That whole thing about me improving trade relations is still true, but it mostly serves a cover for my real work. With this data, I'm now one step closer." Xun explained.

"I've never seen you ready to execute someone in cold blood. It sounds like there's more to it than that." Said Austin.

"It's... it concerns Liara as well. She was on a job with a friend a few years ago. The Shadow Broker's people caught them. Her friend unfortunately didn't escape. I don't know if he's dead or being interrogated, but Liara begged em to find him. She owes him her life. And I think even you will agree that the Shadow broker needs to pay for the things he's done. It was he who sold out may of our squads to the Batarians, he was the real one behind the Crime Lords, and now Liara's friend." Said Xun.

"You're right, even if it may sound a bit cold. Are you sure there's nothing I can do to help?" Austin asked.

"Well... perhaps there is. The data you gave me was extremely useful. It's given me a target. The Shadow Broker has several contacts here on Ilium. The most powerful is someone called the Observer." Said Xun.

“Tell me what I can do to help.” Said Austin.

“Your data pointed me at logs kept by Shadow Broker agents. The logs were deleted, but it may be possible to reconstruct some of it. The Shadow Broker is cautious. His agents are referred to only by their title and race.” Said Xun.

“My inquiries have narrowed the Observer down to one of five operatives: a Turian, a Salarian, a Krogan, a Batarian, and a Vorcha.” Said Nyxeris.

“If you can refine the list, I’ll know where to strike.” Xun finished.

“Do you have any specifics on these agents?” Austin asked.

“I’m afraid not. Nyxeris was lucky to get as much as she did.” Xun replied.

“I was happy to help, ma’am.” Said Nyxeris as she bowed her head.

“The data is our only hope of determining which one is the Observer. And if we wait too long, they’ll all disappear.” Said Xun.

“Okay, I’ll reconstruct the data and tell you what I find.” Said Austin.

“Thank you, Shepard. When you find something, call me on the radio channel we and your squad used in the old days. I can’t risk handling this in person.” Said Xun.

“I’ll talk to you later, Xun.” Said Austin as he stood up from his chair.

Several long minutes later, Austin had searched all five terminals in Illium. However, all the messages he had read had left him confused. All the messages made reference to each operative’s gender. However, the Observer was female and the suspects were all male. Xun needed to know about this.

Austin activated his omni tool and Xun’s hologram appeared out of it in the same way that EDI often did.

“Shepard. Did you get any information on the Observer?” she asked.

“All five of the suspects are male. The observer is female. Something’s

not right – who gave you this lead?” Austin replied.

“My current assistant, Nyxeris. She got the information... Nyxeris gave me the information.” “Nyxeris, could I see you in here for a moment? Shepard, I’ll talk to you later.” Said Xun.

Austin immediately headed back to Xun’s office. Unsurprisingly, Nyxeris was no longer at her desk. Austin found Xun in exactly the same position he’d left her as he entered her office.

“Hello again, old friend. Nyxeris had some interesting data hidden away. Thank you, Shepard. I knew I couldn’t trust her when she was brought in as a temporary replacement for Oranna, but I wouldn’t have her without you.” Said Xun as Austin sat back down. “I’m one step closer to the Shadow Broker, thanks to you. Here. Nyxeris was well compensated. You need it more than I do.” She said as she handed him some more credits.

“Did you have any trouble with Nyxeris?” Austin asked.

“It’s me, remember? She was very talented, though. I imagine that had she been ordered to assassinate me, I’d never have seen her coming. But she counted on me being a biotic. A mistake I’m afraid she now won’t be able to learn from.” Xun smiled under her helmet.

“So what’s the next step in your hunt?” Austin asked.

“Now I gather information, peel away layers of lies, and shine light into the shadows. And when I find the Shadow Broker, I stick my Katana and my fan so far into his body that what’s left will fit into a coffee cup.” Said Xun.

Austin thought about his next question for a while before he eventually asked. There was something he needed to know.

“Xun... this anger you seem to have can’t just be from what you’ve told me. What else happened between Liara and the Shadow Broker?” he asked.

Xun was silent for a long time before she finally answered with a sigh.

“I suppose you deserve to know the truth. But if I’m going to tell you, call Liara and tell her to come here.” She said.

“Why?” Austin asked.

“It would be better if you heard this story from both of us. Just trust me, Shepard.” Xun replied.

“Okay, I’ll call her.” Said Austin as he got up from his chair and went outside where Samara, Miranda and Jack were waiting for him.

“You three, head back to the Normandy. I have something I need to care of myself.” He said.

“Of course, Shepard.” Said Samara.

Once the three had left, Austin activated his omni tool again, and this time called Liara.

“Liara, can you come to Xun’s office? There’s something we need to discuss.” He said.

“I’ll be right there, Austin.” Liara replied.

Liara quickly arrived and walked into the information broker’s office. Since this would be a civil talk, everyone retracted their Helldiver helmets.

“Xun.” Liara nodded.

“Liara.” Xun nodded back.

“Xun’s told me about this little skirmish you had with the Shadow Broker not long after I died. About how you lost your friend. She tells me that’s why she’s hunting the Shadow Broker, but I still feel as though there’s more to it. What exactly happened? Is there something you’re not telling me?” Austin asked.

Like Xun, Liara sighed and seemed to remain silent for a while before she finally answered.

“I was hoping to avoid this, Austin. I fear you’ll not look at me the same way if I tell you.” The Asari sighed.

“Liara, I could never hate you. I love you. I promise things will not

change between us. Just tell me truth, please. Said Austin reassuringly as he took Liara's chin in his hand.

"Okay." Liara sighed. "Did you ever wonder how Cerberus recovered your frozen body?"

"Your right actually? I have actually been curious. How did they recover it?" Austin asked. Up till now, it hadn't occurred to him how Cerberus had recovered his body while his suit had been in lockdown in order to rebuild him.

"I gave it to them." Liara replied.

"What?" said Austin in surprise.

"I gave you to them, Austin. Because they said they could rebuild you. I knew they could not be trusted, and I was already a Helldiver at the time. But if there was the possibility I'd be able to see you again, I could not bring myself to refuse. And so to find your body, I had to take it from the Shadow Broker, who was going to sell your corpse to the Collectors." Liara explained.

"But... why didn't you tell me about this before now?" Austin asked.

"Because I always hated working for the enemy. And I screwed it up, Austin. I barely escaped with my own life. And when I gave you to Cerberus, I told myself I was doing it for you, for a chance to bring you back. If only I'd known that your suit alone was able to bring you back from the dead, I would've instead taken you to the Helldivers, so you could be kept safe. I knew Cerberus would try to use you for their own business. And I let it happen. Because I couldn't let you go, my love. I... I'm... I'm so sorry." Said Liara. She could no longer contain it now and she started crying.

Austin immediately hugged Liara close to him and allowed her to calm down slightly before he finally looked her in the eyes and spoke to her.

"Liara, listen to me. You did the right thing. Cerberus is the enemy, yes. But they still kept me safe. They kept me out of the Collector's hands while my suit put me back together. If you ask me, that's definitely better than being in Collector hands. So it's fair to say that you're the real one that brought me back. I wouldn't be here today if you hadn't given me to Cerberus. I don't even care that you worked with them briefly. I would've done the same for you." He said calmly.

“Th... thank you, Austin. I was... afraid you’d hate me.” Liara sniffed as she smiled at Austin’s soothing, British accented voice.

“When will you ever learn, Liara. I could never hate you. I love you more than anything in this galaxy and I’d do anything for you. And besides, very few would do what you did. That just shows how much you truly loved me. You never gave up, you refused to let me go. So many people would never do that. You want my opinion? You’re as much a hero as I am.” Austin smiled as he stroked Liara’s cheek.

“I love you.” Liara smiled.

“I love you too.” Austin smiled back.

Both lovers pulled each other into a kiss and failed to let go for several long minutes. Eventually, the two finally separated for air and looked lovingly into each other’s eyes.

“So now you know, Shepard. After Liara gave your body to Cerberus, she cut ties with them and just hoped that she’d see you again at some point, even if Cerberus now used you. Sometime later, she came to me and told me everything. She wanted the Shadow Broker to pay. But she couldn’t do it herself since she now had duties as a Helldiver. She still wished to honor you by becoming one of us. And so she pleaded me to find him. I owe you many favours and so I eventually felt that if I refused, I’d be insulting your memory. I agreed and started searching. For a time, I did it in secret. Eventually of course, the Arkane Council and the Helldivers wanted the Shadow Broker taken down too. And so I no longer needed to seraph in secret. So, that’s why I must destroy the Shadow Broker. For what he did to Liara’s friend, to Liara, and to you, and whatever he’s doing with the Collectors.” Said Xun.

“Thank you. Thank you both for telling me this. I guess now I understand why you didn’t want to tell me. You were afraid of how I’d react.” Austin said to both of them.

“Weakness on our part, Austin. I should’ve told you when we rekindled our love. You deserved to know.” Liara sighed.

“What’s done is done, Liara. I know now, and that’s all that matters. Actually, that’s not what matters. What really matters is that I got you back. You gave me everything. A life without you would be worse than death.” Said Austin.

“Now you’re starting to rub it in, Austin.” Liara smiled, her mood now

brightening due to Austin's flattery.

"Then stop regretting what you did. You can let it go now." Said Austin.

"You're right. I can now. But I cannot forget what the Shadow Broker dead. He must still pay for what he did." Said Liara.

"That I can understand. In fact I agree with you." Austin smiled as he continued holding Liara in his arms. Both he and Liara however had forgotten that Xun was in the room.

"With all due respect, Shepard. I think it would be better if you two didn't have this conversation in front of me. Go back to the Normandy. Cherish your love for one another." She said.

"Yes, you're right, Xun. Sorry." Said Austin.

"I'll be here if you require any more help from me, my old friend." Xun smiled as she sat back down in her chair.

"Just be careful out there, Xun. Don't turn into the thing you're hunting." Said Austin.

"You know me better than that, Shepard. Don't worry. I'm not the Shadow broker. Everything I'm doing, I'm doing of my own free will... for better or for worse, and for you." Said Xun.

"Goodbye, Xun. I hope you find something eventually." Said Liara as she and Austin turned to leave the office.

"So do I. Good luck on your mission, my friends. Give the Collectors hell!"

BROKEN WINGS CHAPTER II

by Tiffany Kennedy
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NARUTO (-???)-Masashi Kishimoto & Shueisha.
Original Characters & plot belongs to me.
Broken Wings -Re-Write-
A modern day Naruto Fanfiction.

She hadn't come out of her room all day. Itachi vacated it, well he actually got kicked out but after a while he accepted it. Now he was sleeping in the guest bedroom while she stayed in his room. He found her by that tree, asleep and he had to take her back. She sat there on the bed, covers wrapped around her, snuggled into her panda spirit hood while she rocked back and forth. She had no idea how long she had been like this, weeks, maybe months. She just couldn't face the world. It felt as if everyone out there would laugh at her, for being so stupid, for falling for Gaara, for thinking he could possibly like her too.

He could've just told her, sorry I don't really like you, how simple is that to say. Why did he have to make that speech? He was very clear about his feeling. He didn't like her. He thought she had bewitched him. He used her to take away his own pain. Every single thing he said still rung in his mind and she knew she could never let it go.

Her fist hammered into the pillow hard. She screamed into it. Louder than she had before, over and over again her hands hit the pillow. She kicked the other cushions off the bed and she heard footsteps running up to the room. A body slammed against the door trying to push it open. Aoi puffed. She had it tightly locked and for extra security there were even chairs piled up against the door. She had also come up with an invention of a few strings and what not that would hit those who entered. She puffed, cringing at everything.

"Aoi! Are you alright?!" Itachi yelled from the other side of the door. She screamed a loudly to him, not saying any words just screaming. She threw the pillow towards the door. She hadn't had any social interaction for so long. She wasn't ready to interact. It was just the way she was. She stopped screaming and Itachi stopped knocking on the door. He had never seen her like this before, it even hurt him. She got up and turned to the wall. She grabbed a paint brush. She had been painting all over the walls. There were paint buckets and brushes scattered everywhere, Itachi knew she liked to paint so he had bought them for her. It also calmed her down; it got read of those painful emotions.

She stroked the brush against the white wall. She had already painted skeletons falling apart, there were splotches of red paint over them from when she had thrown some paint at the walls in anger, she cried that day because she ruined her piece but now that she thought about it, it didn't look too bad. She had also painted butterflies with broken wings, birds that had no wings, insects losing their legs, and a girl with a broken heart that fell like sand. She continued painting; the black on white was marvellous to her.

Sown stairs, everyone was waiting for any change. Aoi didn't really know that everyone was down there. She heard Sakura and Tenten talking a lot but they were the only two people she knew were there. It was funny because every single one of her friends were there, even those who she didn't really talk to. Kiba, Ino, sakura, Tenten, Naruto, Hinata, Shino, Shikamaru, Temari, everyone was there but Gaara. Sakura had fallen asleep on Sasuke since she decided to stay for a few nights. They were all on the couch, just waiting for a change. Even Sasuke was slightly worried and he only voiced that to Sakura. He twirled her hair while she was fast asleep against his shoulder. No one really saw them but it would've been such a cute sight to see.

Aoi screamed causing Hinata to jump, she was so scared. She held onto Naruto tightly, who was enjoying this far too much. Kiba had his arm around Ino who was trying to stay awake. Tenten was fast asleep on the floor, drooling slightly. It was around two in the morning, Aoi was still not asleep and the others decided to stay the night. Aoi didn't really sleep anymore. She was stuck in a living nightmare. If she was to come down they would all be there. They wanted to be there. They knew she needed their support but no one knew what actually happened.

That night Aoi was found by Itachi by the tree, she was a complete mess. Her blue hair was tangled within dirt, her arm had dried up blood with cuts across it, her face was slightly puffy from crying and she had a red mark on one cheek. Itachi carried her home and up to his room. He left her there to sleep and went to sleep in the guest room that night. The next morning the door was locked and she wouldn't come out. They've been worried ever since. Itachi slumped down stairs to the lounge room.

"Any change?" Naruto moved forward slightly. Hinata shook against him.

"No," he sighed, "she screamed, yells, hits whatever and then goes quiet. Every single time. She making me worry too much.

"You only care about her, she's not even of blood," Sasuke muttered.

"What's that teme?" Naruto said to Sasuke.

"Shut up Dobe."

Naruto scowled at his best friend. He looked at Hinata. She was

scared shit less. She was shaking and everything. Naruto put his arms around her and held her close. She stopped shaking from fear and instead she turned bright red. A while later she fell asleep. Everyone was asleep except for Naruto and Itachi. Naruto was one of those people that put everyone before himself. He just couldn't sleep without knowing his mate was okay and Itachi well; he was just being a caring older brother.

Naruto swore that this had something to do with Gaara. Gaara was his friend, they were a lot alike but he had to do something about this. They were all trying to piece this together, what had happened but all they knew was that it had something to do with Gaara.

Aoi dropped the paint brush and sat back on the floor. She felt like crying. Why couldn't she let go? Why did it sting so much? She was drawn back to him. She had never felt this before. It felt like every single thing in her body ached, somehow within all of that she managed not to hate him. She didn't want to hate me, she couldn't hate him. She just wanted to be in his arms and try to make him smile.

What happened? Why was it like this? She punched the wall and screamed. How did she mess this up? How the fuck did she mess this up? Everything was right and then...she sighed falling back to the floor her eyes were swelling with tears.

Little did she know, Gaara was standing on the tree near her window, watching her. He wanted to help her; you could see it in his eyes. He told her the truth or what his demon said was the truth and he just wished he had never said it. It was just that inner voice speaking, trying to convince him. He thought he could get answers and he knew that it was the wrong way. He just wished he never said it. But what's done is done. Maybe it was better off this way. For the both of them. Even Gaara felt the need for an overdone outburst. He knew he wouldn't be able to find happiness. He would be stuck with the pain and he would need to control it again. She took away his control. He didn't want to be hyped up on some girl who was like a drug. Even though he had yelled and screamed at her that day, he was still following her around. An invisible link lead them together, it always did. He hated it, even after all of that he was still following her around.

Gaara jumped. He almost fell out of the tree. Aoi saw him. He wasn't very good at hiding around her. She screamed. She didn't know how to socialize, not anymore. She wanted to say something, she honestly did but she hadn't spoken in so long. She forgot how to talk. She lifted up a chair and threw it at the window. Gaara jumped off the tree quickly. The chair didn't even hit the window; it reached the floor and dropped. She hadn't thrown an actually hard object within her time in this room and she didn't really want to hurt Gaara.

"Aoi!" Itachi hit the door and screamed once again, "Aoi!"

“GAARA!” Aoi raised her voice. She fell to her knees and puffed. This was the first time she had spoken in so long.

THE TALE OF TWENTY THREE

CHAPTER 2 - THE ELEMENTAL SANCTUARY

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“Calm down, Wind. It’s me! It’s Zelda!” Zelda giggled as the beast moved forward, her armour clanging as it moved. Wind let out a gasp but did not say anything; his throat had closed up on him. She had lost her pure ghostly form and had appeared in a suit of metal, a pink suit of metal no doubt. He could see a pair of pink pupil-less eyes stare at him through a thick helmet with two horns on either side; she wore a heavy chest plate with a pair of swirls that danced in the middle along with the pair on her helmet and shoulder plates. Her stubby legs were covered by a knee height skirt that was covered in dents and her little hands were covered by dark gloves but it was not these things that made him shriek. Zelda withdrew a huge jagged sword from behind her back and grasped it tightly in her right hand, the hilt was long and extended till it was nearly touching her knee and the two pairs of jagged points of the sword nearly touching the side of the helmet, the sword was nearly the size of him and could easily strike him down, instead as she pulled out a shield the size of a cart floor and lifted it above her head, the design on the shield was of a tower surrounded by two triangles and two gears. Wind wondered what it meant

Zelda vanished in a puff of pink smoke, leaving circles in Winds frightened eyes. He could hear footsteps go across the roof and Spirit jump down onto freight cart behind the carriage, he could see Zelda lift the King of Red Lion’s above her head as if he were a toy as Spirit pulled on the Grappling Hook to tow him to the cart. Wind pulled out his Picto Box and quickly snapped the scene, for people who had hardly any link to the Tri-Force, they were very brave. Why were they here? Zelda tossed the King of Red Lions as hard as she could and reappeared back in the carriage, just in time to see Wind hide the Picto Box behind his back, the pictograph fell out through a small slot under the shutter and escaped out of the window as Zelda opened it, she was handed the Grappling Hook as Spirit crossed the roof again.

“Hold tight!” Spirit shouted pulling a rope cord on his left, the steam from the chimney got thicker as the train gained even more speed, the wheels were shooting sparks of glitter and yellow light as Wind opened a window, he could see them heading back in the direction of the tower. Yellow light began to pour from inside one of the arches,

the light started off small, then grew to the width of the arch, it began to change colour to a light green as they got closer. Zelda gave one final heave on the Grappling Claw before slamming the window down on the rope. The Helmaroc King dove at the train as the buffers touched the light, showering the train a golden yellow before disappearing, leaving nothing but a few pieces of glitter behind in the Helmaroc King's claws.

"The boy seems to have gone-snort-with a twin, Lord Ganondorf." a Moblin grunted wiping his snout free of crumbs

"Gone?! How can he be gone?!" Ganondorf snarled flashing a pair of huge swords from inside his sleeve. The Moblin let out a squeal like a pig and raised his spear in defence

"He went with him-snort-near the Tower of-snort-the Gods. Some kind of magic-snort-made him go." the Moblin spoke as if trying to drink at the same time

"How dare you speak of magic?! Who was this twin of his? Did you see him?" Ganondorf ordered tapping the ground with his swords, but kept his back turned to his minion

"We found this in the shallows next to Eastern Triangle Island." the Moblin replied creeping up to Ganondorf, his hand shaking as he handed a pictograph to him. Ganondorf snatched it, making the Moblin scream in fright and run for the door. Ganondorf's ever frowning face glared at the pictograph, his tiny black eyes studying every little line on the paper.

"So the one without courage lets the gears of fate cross my oceans?" Ganondorf groaned lifting the pictograph up "And the Phantom? Another Zelda from another time? So they have started." Ganondorf stared at the pictograph silently for a short while; he slipped his sword back up his sleeve, the red tassels on the ends of the hilts blowing in the breeze from the open balcony of his room. His ginger hair turned static the more he walked, with his clothes picking up dust from the carpet and sticking up floorboards that the carpet had missed "Was there any more evidence of this so called twin of his?" Ganondorf asked quietly, the Moblin lifted his lantern from his belt and picked up a handmade bag no bigger than the palm of his hand

"There was this on the Helmaroc King's claws. It burns us." the

Moblin sniffed showing his spear hand was covered in tiny red spots, Ganondorf reached for it and lifted it in his hands. The smell of burning skin began to rise from him, he let it drop onto the carpet with a yell.

“Leave this room. I must have a talk in private.” Ganondorf ordered through his teeth as the burning feeling ran up his arm like the glitter’s purpose was to attack him, the Moblin left, Ganondorf stomped onto the balcony and looked into the sky, the stormy clouds raged over the sea like schools of fish

“I wonder what Ganon’s up to?” a voice asked from inside the room through a small mirror that hung lazily on the wall

“I have some news...Master.”

Wind curled up into a ball on a seat, there was not much to see out of the window apart from the yellow strips that went by like shooting stars. Spirit seemed to look bored as well; he was slouched over his seat behind him

“Are you alright, Wind?” Zelda asked walking up to him in the Phantom’s armour

“I’m fine.” Wind squeaked uncurling himself and shuffling over to give room for Zelda to sit down

“What’s it like living in a world covered in water?” Zelda quizzed turning to look at him. He’d vanished “Wind?”

“Zel-” Wind muttered tapping on her helmet from above with his left hand, Zelda glanced up to see Wind had made another dent in the ceiling, the force of her sitting down had acted like he was attached to a piece of elastic and had pulled him up. Zelda reached for him and pulled him off the ceiling like an old plaster, half shifting most of the bones in his ribcage. She hugged him in apology; Wind thought he could hear the sound of his bones in his arms being crushed to dust “Can’t breathe.” he spluttered, Zelda let out a small gasp and dropped him

“Don’t kill him. We need him for a while and I don’t have any potions.” Spirit chortled dragging himself off the seat and went past the curtain. The carriage suddenly lurched, sending Wind and Zelda

against the door at the rear of the carriage, Wind saw the yellow lights fade through the window and show large rocks, darkened with age and dust. The carriage stopped moving and Spirit emerged from behind the curtain “We’ve arrived. According to the map; we’re at the top Mt. Crenel.” Spirit informed pulling a suitcase out from under the nearest seat to the curtain. “Are you coming?”

“Me?” Wind gulped, picking himself up from the floor

“I could use some company.” Spirit answered opening the rear carriage door, he stepped out to find the King of Red Lions looking slightly frazzled, Spirit fastened him down with the Grappling Hook onto the freight car with ties that clung onto the sides of the metal.

“What in the name of Nayru was that?!” he roared as Spirit tied him down

“A Space-Time portal. They’re all over Hyrule in my time.” Spirit replied

“Isn’t there anything I can do?” Zelda shouted from the carriage, she was back in her normal ghostly form

“Stay with happy here. I need you to look after the train.” Spirit spoke opening the suitcase “Isn’t that what Princesses do anyway?”

“Don’t go there.” Zelda hissed folding her arms, Wind jumped out of the carriage and breathed in the stuffy mountain air, there was hardly a patch of green anywhere or a single drop of water.

“Hold up a moment.” Spirit muttered slapping an arm out till he nearly hit Wind’s face; Wind caught a peek of the shield. It was polished and the silver rim glowed in the scorching sunlight, there was a lobster on the front, its claws reaching out almost in protection of the shield. The swirls of white sparkled on the wood yet despite the amount of great care the shield had Wind could see there were dents that had been hammered out and chew marks from monsters running into its defence. Spirit caught his gaze and let his eyes soften “This was my grandfather’s, he got it years ago from his grandparents. It’s a little worn but-” Spirit began but Wind threw his arms around his neck

“You kept my shield protecting people!” Wind yelled, Spirit fell on the floor, sending little clouds of dust at his feet

“Um, Niko gave it to me, he was one of your friends, you gave him the

shield and told him to give it to me when I was ready.” Spirit stammered as Wind’s grip got tighter around his neck “Let go!” Spirit wailed

“You’re my grandson!” Wind squealed

“And you’re a ten year old that is squeezing all the air out of my lungs, what’s your point?” Spirit grunted pushing him off and thrusting a belt into his chest, he could see his face had turned red.

“Why do I need a new belt?” Wind asked holding it up; it was a little darker than his own and in the middle of the buckle was a small teardrop shape that glowed yellow. Before Spirit could open his mouth Wind dropped the belt and turned completely see through, his hair rose with static electricity as he began to blur and fizz to the point of his voice being drowned out by white noise “What’s happening?” he whined as he flapped his hands, unable to touch anything. He began to turn grainy and was covered in black and white specks. Then suddenly, it stopped.

“That’s why.” Spirit sighed throwing the belt at him again.

“Hyrule castle, been a while since I was last here.” Ezlo mumbled bouncing on Minish’s head, his bed head hair was fit for nest making for birds but it did not make sitting on his head any easier. Minish let out a moan as Ezlo shifted uncomfortably on his head, the fabric of his form scratched through Minish’s hair like a brush making him wail as he could feel the tats coming out with full force. “Oh, stop complaining, if I could move faster then I would, but you are the only way I can get around.” Ezlo grunted, Minish growled under his breath and looked around. The beauty of the place was missed and hidden by the castle. Surrounded by walls, the grass was short and shadowy even in the best of times, the poor potted plants looking lost in their brick pots, their little flowers reaching for the sunlight almost desperately. Minish kicked a small pebble off the path and watched it roll down the brick path with what he thought were hearts. A tunnel was open behind him, the darkness inside the tunnel made him gag on his breath but he forced himself to enter as the walls glowed mustard yellow behind him in two stripes.

It was darker than he had expected, the walls were dark blue and housed no source of light and the floor was cold as stone with a single dark green rug with clovers for pattern. Minish squinted to see as he

pressed a hand on a huge jewel, taller than him; dark blue in colour till it could be mistaken for a pillar. Minish carried on down the tunnel, barely being able to see a thing till he entered through another door “This must be the Elemental Sanctuary.” Ezlo muttered, his voice carrying an echo through the darkness.

“Isn’t that what we came for?” Minish grunted scratching his head

“Don’t tell me that you have head lice! I’ve been sitting on your head for ages now!” Ezlo squealed half jumping off Minish’s head

“No, hats are just itchy.” Minish replied in his quiet voice

“Honestly, you can’t trust children these days! Tell me the truth!” Ezlo demanded

“I’m not a child. I’m eight...and a half!” Minish moaned rubbing his hands under Ezlo, his curls flopped over his face as he breathed a sigh of relief.

“Finished?” Ezlo asked, his voice sounding slightly nervous at the fact he could be sitting in head lice

“Yes.” Minish said with a smile, his big blue eyes getting bigger as he looked up

“Can we continue?” Ezlo quizzed

“No.” Minish replied

“Does that mean ‘yes?’” Ezlo sighed letting a smile cross his beak

“Yes!” Minish giggled clapping his hands. Ezlo sighed, dragging an eight year old around with you was hard when the said eight year old kept thinking how turning things upside down with the Cane of Pachi was massively entertaining. Either that or it was the Gust Jar. How odd it seemed to him, the boy was defeating things much bigger than himself but was gasping in awe at the sight of how he could make villagers scream in Hyrule Castle Town by sticking a paper bag on the end of the Gust Jar and making it pop.

Minish continued down the tunnel and walked through the exit into another room. The grey door slammed shut behind them making Minish whine. It was a little lighter in this room compared to the tunnel and the air was clear and cold. To either side of him were two

switches and four pink tiles in front of statues of swordsmen; their swords lifted in the air as if they were knighting an invisible person. Minish walked around them, he had learned that anything could happen with things that were shiny or symmetrical. Minish picked his pace up till he got to a small set of stairs. Upon the raised ground were four circular pedestals surrounding a shorter, flatter one in the middle with a hole for a sword. Minish climbed up the stairs slowly

“This is where we can infuse your blade with the power of the Elements.” Ezlo said, disturbing the peace of the room. Minish readied his sword and stabbed it into the hole; the grass green hilt shone in a sunless light. The collected Elements, the purple, three pronged, Earth Element and the space-hopper lookalike, Fire Element, flew from his pouch to the two pedestals behind him; they glowed and shot out a beam of coloured light to the sword, making Minish gasp. The sword began to light up yellow and then after a crash of white light. Minish held a red sword above his head. The blade gleaming off the sunless light. The room began to shake as a stone tablet appeared at the back of the room; Minish plodded towards it with the evolved sword and read the tablet “Fill your sword with power over the glowing tile.” Ezlo muttered

“I can read, you know. I learned.” Minish spoke pulling the sword out of its sheath and held it out till the blade shone red. The tile underneath him flashed white in replacement to his shadow and let him shuffle to the tile on the right. A quick spin attack and there was a see through version of himself standing on his left, but only for a moment.

Minish left the sanctuary and jogged into the Castle Garden, the paved paths were free of weeds and was stared at blankly by armed guards. Minish wandered past a pair of hedges that were neatly trimmed down till he could just see over them, the tiny black birds were making their nests inside. Minish distracted himself with looking at the pots and pots of flowers, he wondered if any Picori lived there.

After a few minutes of blank expressions of a bored eight year old, Ezlo jumped off Minish’s head as he scratched through his golden locks.

“You need a bath.” Ezlo grunted

“I don’t want a bath.” Minish replied scratching harder

“You need a bath, come on.” Ezlo hissed pulling on Minish’s tunic; Minish sat down in the grass and folded his arms

“I’m not taking a bath. Not even for Zelda.” Minish said

“Stubborn child, you stink, you need a hair wash. Now, up!” Ezlo growled but the child refused to move and was searching for something in his pouch. Ezlo was blown back a few inches “Don’t you dare put it on your head.” Ezlo seethed seeing the boy lift the Gust Jar above his head like he was trying to dare his patience. Minish’s irritated expression never changed as he lowered the Gust Jar down on his head, covering his golden afro and most of his face.

“I’m NOT taking a bath.” Minish muttered, his voice muffled by the Gust Jar. Ezlo let out a sigh, the child was hard to work with when he got stubborn. This could go on for hours, even Vaati knew that was a sign to vanish. Ezlo looked at the Gust Jar; the basin was made of pottery with two handles that were a paper white; there were blue swirls for design around the middle and two claws on either side of the opening that was now closed by Minish’s head. Ezlo turned his back on him for a moment and hopped a few paces so he was around the back of the tree that Minish had sat next to; he could see the town nearby, perhaps the promise of treats may win him over.

“Hey, Minish, why not we get some-Minish?” Ezlo asked coming back around the tree to find him gone “Minish?! Minish! Boys, excuse me?!” Ezlo cried seeing a pair of boys wander by on the path, one in green garb and the other in dark blue with a green sling around his right arm

“Can we help you?” the one in green asked

“Have you seen a boy with blond hair in green clothes?” Ezlo asked desperately, the boy in blue pointed at the boy in green

“We’re searching for a child named Minish. You wouldn’t know him, sir?” the boy in green questioned picking Ezlo up

“That’s him! Have you seen him? He went off by himself a few minutes ago. You can’t trust him to do anything when he has a tantrum.” Ezlo wailed

“Ezlo, calm down, I’ll find him.” the boy in blue said with a smile

“How do you know my name?” Ezlo demanded shaking out of the boy

in green's grasp

"I'm Spirit and this is Wind. Minish may have his own mission but he is needed for something much bigger and worse than just a grumpy Picori too big for his hat." Spirit sighed

"Vaati is...I guess you have a point, but Zelda was turned to stone. What do you say to that?" Ezlo smirked "And, how did you know that?"

"Mine's dead. She is a ghost that haunts my train." Spirit joked

"Why are you here, Spirit? You look very different to the locals, much taller than them for just boys." Ezlo grunted

"We've come to pick you and Minish up." Wind muttered, Spirit turned on his heel and ran back down the path, his arm bashing hard against his chest.

"Why ask him to go and hunt for him?" Ezlo whined seeing the look of pain of Spirit's face

"I can't really argue with him. He's got a giant beast covered in armour." Wind whispered

"How did he hurt his arm?" Ezlo gulped

"We were climbing down Mt. Crenel then all these rocks started falling, Spirit pushed me out of the way but was hit by a rock and fell, he landed on his arm." Wind sighed

"Have you been crying?" Elzo murmured

Spirit entered the northern Hyrule Town. But before he could even get close to the nearest house, he saw a little boy trying to yank a pot off his head in the entrance

"Hang on there." Spirit giggled seizing a tight grip on one of the handles and pulled it carefully off his head

"Thanks." Minish growled as Spirit handed him the Gust Jar "I guess you need me to do some kind of chore for you helping me."

"No, but I do need your help." Spirit replied

“Forget it; I’m not helping you with some long sidequest.” Minish snarled drawing his sword

“I thought you might say that.” Spirit chortled holding up a handmade bag

“Are those sweets?” Minish asked licking his lips

POETRY

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John Mahler's Quotes of the Day

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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!

NEW START

Maria Kubiak
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My heart beats again,
I am not full of pain,
But love, love is feeling welcome.

Because sometimes you need face the feeling.
And act brave,
Be ready for that shock wave.
Stand strong,
Know what is wrong,

Because when I miss you,
I feel like I kiss you,
That one more time,
When I climb,
On top of your heart,
To make a new start.

INTERNAL ISLANDER

by Travis French
travfrenc@gmail.com

I've got this feeling

My words don't echo

They stir and fall out of my mouth

I spew woe out of my mouth with little to no energy

I hold grudges

I hold onto to love

Dead, lost, and those ones that never even happened

My pen is cracking , all this ink

It's staining my hands

My escape is the written word

My prison is perfectionism

A trap that not even you could escape

Writing feverishly

I've got this feeling

My words don't echo

So like a letter in a bottle

I'll toss this computer into the oceans

So someday my words will reach you all

ELITE WEREWOLVES

by FeatherSpiral of <http://featherspiral.deviantart.com>

Mythologies roaming free all around,
Legends, creatures in this world all abound;
Your guard is precious, don't let it down,
This will get dangerous, and we've just begun.

Don't stray from the group, or you'll be someone's lunch,
Better stay together, thank you very much;
Just follow the guide, that's what he was trained for.
We hope you enjoy your stay and world tour!

Chorus:

We are Elite Werewolves, we're the world police
In this fantasy land, every day overnight;
We are Elite Werewolves, we protect this place,
We're the mightiest band, and it's the worst of threats we fight.

Baddies wanna bring us down, to no avail,
Thought it's so fun to watch them try and fail;
So don't look suspicious, give us your trust,
Don't act like a genius, 'cause beware you must.

Don't seek adventure, or you'll be someone's lunch,
Better keep all alive, thank you very much;
Just sit back and chill, that's what we're aiming for.
We hope you enjoy your stay and world tour!

Chorus

We're not the only keepers,
There are many more fantasy guardians;
Once we happen to meet each other
They stay best friends with us.

Chorus (x2)

SERENITY BE MY HEART

by Solilska of <http://solilska.deviantart.com>

In the silence of the night.
Dressed In darkness, I approach my love.
I Whisper to soothe her heart:
"Long have I waited...Alone...For you"

In this secret place, We stand together.
In silence, We need nothing.
In this secret place, I want nothing.
Serenity be my heart, In the presence of my goddess.

LIFE, DEATH AND INSANITY

by Liquidflamesymphony of
<http://Liquidflamesymphony.deviantart.com>

Death; The vengeance of past sins finally coming to pass
A cruel, unstainable, inescapable master
Taking countless lives in the blink of an eye
Filling us with so much fear we can barely even think
With such foreboding shadows, death pushes us to the brink.
Consuming us...
Becoming us...
Breaking us; until freedom is just another lie shoved down our throats
Forever plaguing us until we are too weak to try
You must realize that fighting is futile
So go now; let the darkness slowly take you
And leave us with a smile.

However, if you'd like to cheat this most unkindly fate.
Know that it is never too late, and let me teach you the opposite
of this most unpleasant feat.

Life: The beauty of existence.
A much needed distraction from our daily trials
If only we slowed down enough to realize it.
Yes, we often abuse the great gift of life
Ignoring the gentle spirit that fills us with light
No longer ensnared by our own greedy spite
The sweet, rejuvenating essence that seeps into your soul
Isn't that life's true concluding goal?
To fill us with such a glorious feeling.
Allowing our minds to be freed from the terrible burden it bears.
Gracing our bodies with a silent, staccato heart-beat.
Leading us down the path less traveled; into the arms of a loving
God.

Oh, aren't you the stubborn soul?
You've seen two choices; perhaps you'd like one more?
I assure you that you won't be disappointed.

Insanity: that delirious, fragmented dream.

Born of imagination: A madman's delusional scheme.
Tuning the simplest things into terrifying apparitions.
Or are they merely friendly specters; keeping us company in this
lonely asylum?
If nothing else, insanity is the thin line between death and
immortality
Trapped within this strange purgatory
Creators of your own twisted story; an erratic, endless fairytale.
Where your every nightmare becomes reality.
Are you completely certain that you want to go down this road?
Once you do, there is no going back.
But, alas, this is the price you must pay for your indefinence.
As you gaze into the mirror, and see the nothingness behind your
diseased eyes.

Now that you've learned more about the three ways in which we
live.

Are you ready to make your choice?

Will you end in death, rejoice in life, or rebel in insanity?

Or will you realize that you had never had a say to begin with?

