

Fanatical Publishing's

Weekly Review

Issue #58

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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!

If you are not subscribed, but you want to be, there's nothing easier: Just e-mail me at fanaticalweekly@gmail.com with 'subscribing' in the subject line.

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https://www.box.com/files/o/f/594601922/Fanatical_Publishing's_WEEKLY_REVIEW

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>

DESIRES

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

As my seventh written piece i decided to try and talk about desires:

Desires have always been a key and core to us as living organisms. It has also been a key apparent "Evil and/or Sin" In the advancement of our brains towards modern society, mostly due to Religious doctrines and traditions that I don't see as progressive to us anymore.

For me desires are drives, hunger, us wanting to grab something out of the world and enjoy it for what it is. All people are different and this goes doubly so for our desires.

If our desires effect or destroy someone else's freedom and they haven't consented to this then I would deem that desire unfit. If you have a desire which effects your personal life and you enjoy it in your own private time and do so without any harm to others, then you should be left to indulge.

If one of your desires does involve other people but they share this desire or agree to be a part of yours, again, you should both be left to enjoy it.

No person has the right to tell another what they should or shouldn't enjoy or desire. Some people are spiritual, others are carnal and we shouldn't be stopping or judging anyone who has different desires to us. Quite simple, mind your own business.

If it doesn't effect your personal freedom then you can say all you like, opinions are to be shared, but you shouldn't try to stop or change that person. Most importantly you have no right to slander them, they are merely different to you.

LAND OF INSANITY Pt

Riolightwarrior
of <http://Riolightwarrior.deviantart.com>

The world is a cruel place, at least in my eyes. Politicians have you think that your happy, little living is safe, and that nothing will happen to you. They are dead wrong. I am one of the many they have wronged; my name is Bane. I am what they call a "mad-dog", a rogue soldier, someone who went AWOL in the military. Why did I leave? I have my reasons, and fairly good ones. I watched as my friends were slaughtered in front of me. The images of that day still haunts my dreams. After my friends died, something in me snapped. I didn't even care if I lived or died. I shot almost every single person I saw. Left and right, everyone died.

A couple days passed when the back up that was promised to me and my friends arrived. I sat there, guns in hand, smoking a cigarette, staring at them. It was obvious I was not happy. The platoon sergeant asked me "What the Hell happened here, Corporal?"

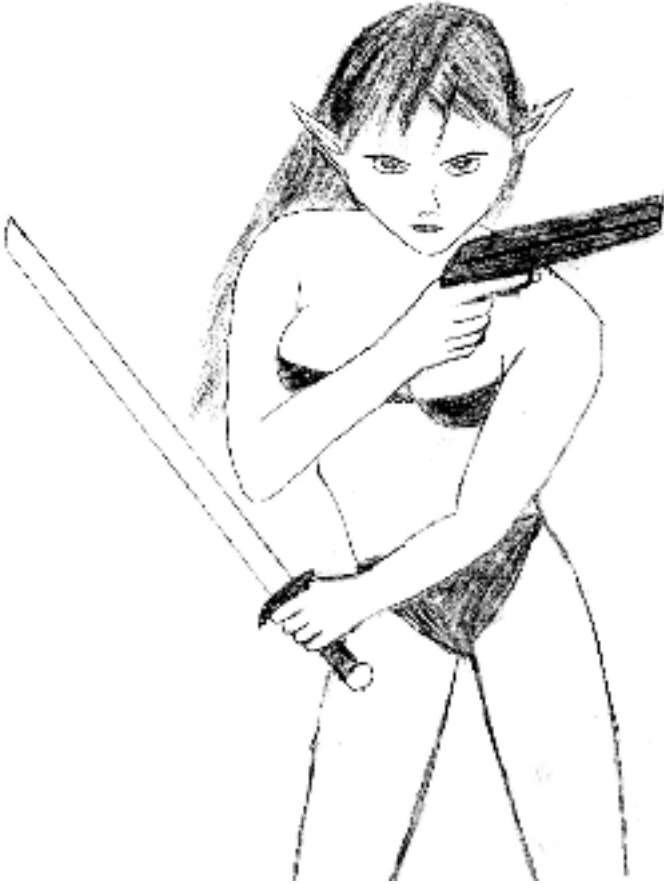
I replied the only way I knew how at that moment, "A slaughter, dip shit. What does it look like?" I think that pissed him off. The look on his face was so priceless to me. The curling on his brows, the anger in his eyes, the gritting of his teeth: I pissed him off good, and I must say I was enjoying it as he yelled at me.

"Watch who you call 'dip shit,' Corporal. I am a sergeant, and I have authority over you. You will show me resp..." His sentence was cut short as I pointed my pistol to his chin. My icy gaze stared him in the eye where fear welled up. He knew I could pull the trigger faster than he could give the command, though he knew they would shoot me after I shot him.

"Honestly, Serg, I don't care about you or your fucking rank. What I saw here has shown me the truth of our precious government."

"You will put your gun down right now, Corporal," the obviously well-built man yelled in fear. "That is an order from a superior officer!" His voice trembled just slightly. I relished as I watched him try to keep his composure.

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 25: RITE OF PASSAGE

Veyron722skyhook
of veyronmaster722@gmail.com

Austin headed down to check on Miranda. She'd been quiet since coming back from Ilium, but Kelly had reported that she'd been smiling a lot. Miranda was found at her usual spot. She smiled though when she saw Austin enter.

"Thanks again, Shepard. Taking the time to help me with my sister... I couldn't have reached Oriana in time without your help." she said as she got up and sat in a different chair that faced the window. She simply watched the stars go by. "And you proved yourself trustworthy..."

"Are you happy about your sister's relocation?" Austin asked.

"She has what I wanted her to have - a normal life, and the freedom to choose her own path. And she knows she has an older sister. A friend." Miranda smiled.

"Are you going to talk to her again?" Austin asked.

"I honestly don't know. For once, I haven't planned that far ahead. I'll deal with it after our mission. I have to stay focused, and she needs time to adjust to her new home on an Arkadian colony." said Miranda.

"You never told me what you talked about." Austin inquired.

"I introduced myself. Her family was shocked. She adjusted quickly, of course. She's as smart as I am. She plays the violin. Loves the adagio movement of Nielsen's Fifth, just like I do. She wants to work in colony development. So her new home will give her some opportunity for that. Told a joke about it. She's really funny. Something we don't share." said Miranda.

"It's funny; I used to think of you as all business. Good to see there's a person under there." Austin smiled.

Miranda smiled back and stood up to face Austin.

"Thanks. I'm beginning to think that maybe serving with you isn't such a bad thing. Thank you, Major. My sister is safe again, thanks in large part to you. I won't forget that." she said.

Austin headed back up to the CIC to think about where to go next.

"Anything new, Kelly?" he asked.

"Grunt seems very agitated. He keeps pacing back and forth

down in the cargo hold. You might want to speak with him." said Kelly.

Austin sighed. He hoped that Grunt wasn't starting to have any problems that would hinder his progress.

Austin quickly went down to the cargo bay where Grunt was residing with his tank still. Kraan was also there, most likely to keep Grunt contained if he got out of hand. True to what Kelly said, Grunt did look as though something was really bothering him.

"Shepard." said Kraan as he acknowledged Austin's presence.

"What's the problem?" Austin asked.

"I don't know. He hasn't spoken to me." said Kraan.

Austin walked a bit closer to Grunt.

"Grunt? Kelly said you're tearing up the place. Something wrong?" he asked.

"Something... is wrong, Shepard. I feel wrong, tense! I just wanna kill something. With my hands. More so than usual, like it's not my choice. Like I just want to, I don't know..." said Grunt. To everyone's surprise, he then head-butted one of the windows so hard that the glass cracked. "See? Why do that? What's wrong?"

"Okeer didn't imprint anything to help you figure this out?" Kraan asked, just as confused as Austin was.

"I see pictures of old battles, voices of warlords. But this is... a blood haze in my head. I want control. When we're moving, fighting, I focus. But here, my blood screams, my plates itch, and even you are just noise! I'm tank-born. What is this?" said Grunt.

"Don't know if I can help, Grunt. Sounds like we need one of your kind to look into this."

"Don't look at me, Shepard. I don't know what this problem is either. I've never known one of my kind to have a problem like this, even a tank-bred. Could be a medical condition. If so, we should probably have a Krogan doctor look at him." said Kraan.

"Most offworld Krogan are warriors. Doctor's don't leave the homeworld. Tuchanka." said Grunt. "I won't ask you to go there. I will control this."

"Joker can get us to the Krogan homeworld. I need everyone at their best." said Austin reassuringly.

"Yeah! We're going back to Tuchanka!" Kraan cheered.

"Thank you, Shepard. I don't like this. Fury is my choice, not a sickness." said Grunt gratefully.

Scarred by bombardment craters, radioactive rubble, chocking ash, salt flats, and alkaline seas, Tuchanka, the Krogan homeworld, was barely capable of supporting life. Thousands of years ago, life grew in fierce abundance under the F-class satar Aralakh (a Raik clan word

meaning "Eye of Wrath"). Tree analogs grew in thick jungles, their roots growing out of shallow salty seas. Life fed upon life in an evolutionary crucible. This world died in nuclear firestorms after the Krogan split the atom. A "little ice age" of nuclear winter killed off the remaining plant life. In recent centuries, many Krogan had returned to their homeworld. The reduced albedo had also caused global temperatures to rise. In order to maintain liveable temperatures, a vast shroud was assembled at the L1 Lagrange point.

The Hellhound dropship touched down and Austin, Grunt and Kraan stepped out. Austin had only chosen on taking the two Krogan with him for this one since he was aware that other Krogan didn't take kindly to aliens visiting their home. Helldivers made an exception since their people were part of them, but that didn't mean they'd have what people would call warm welcomes.

Sure enough, the guards to the entrance didn't seem very enthusiastic to see Austin or Grunt. They did seem respectful of Kraan though. After all, he was an Urdnot.

"The clan leader wants to speak with you." the lead guard said to Austin. He then noticed Grunt. "Keep your rutting pet on a short leash. Get him the rite soon, or put him down."

"You know what's wrong with him? What he needs?" Austin asked.

"There's nothing wrong with him. Just go speak with the clan leader." the guard repeated.

Tuchanka really was a ruin. In fact, Austin felt as though he was walking through the remnants of a war zone camp. Although, to be fair, that was probably what it was. There were a lot of Krogan here though. Whoever the clan leader was had obviously done well. From what Austin had heard his old crew member, Urdnot Wrex, was here and trying to unite the clans. Maybe there was a chance they'd see him.

Nearby, Austin found a shop stool. It was being run by a Krogan. Sat next to the Krogan was a rather large, battle scarred Varren.

"Greetings, Helldiver. My name is Ratch. Have a look at what I've got." said the Krogan.

"Everyone I talk to hates that aliens are in Urdnot. Except you." said Austin.

"I don't have the luxury of turning away paying customers. I do enough business off-world to know that aliens have more credits than people here do." said Ratch.

"What do you have in stock?" Austin asked.

"Most of its food and drink that toxic to humans. Ryncol's a local favourite. Don't try to act tough. Even if you're a Helldiver, it'll tear your insides apart. I knew a human Helldiver who did try it once;

he woke up with two Asari in his bed. On the downside, he had stomach cramps for a week." said Ratch.

"He's not joking. Ryncol hits aliens like ground glass." said Grunt.

"Otherwise, I've got weapons, scrap... and whatever those Pyjaks don't steal... which isn't much." Said Ratch.

"I'm a good shot. Maybe I can help out with the Pyjaks." Austin suggested.

"Feel free. You can use the console out there to control the guns. Make a dent in the Pyjak population and you get a discount." Said Ratch.

The Varren then walked up to Austin and nudged him slightly. Austin noticed that this Varren had a unique skin colour compared to many others. He was mostly light brown with blue stripes on his back.

"Good Varren." said Austin as he petted the creature.

The Varren purred at Austin's touch.

"Huh, he seems to like you. He's never warmed up to strangers before." said Ratch.

"Is he yours?" Austin asked as he continued petting the Varren.

"No. I'm just trusted to look after him. He's a retired pit fighting champion." Ratch replied.

"That explains the scars." said Kraan. Then he realized something. "This isn't Urz, is it?"

Ratch nodded.

"Impressive." said Kraan.

"Stay." he said sternly to Urz.

Urz immediately obeyed and sat down.

Austin headed over to where Ratch had indicated earlier. There were a set of turrets that could be controlled. While Austin did regret having to shoot the Pyjaks since they were kind of cute, it still was a bit fun a good way of target practice. Austin fired shot after shot until finally, the Pyjaks stopped. Austin was certain he'd done enough now and reported back to Ratch. The Krogan was more than pleased to be rid of those Pyjaks now and had even started selling some of their meat.

"Seeing those vermin roasting in the heat from an explosive shell... I swear it was glorious." he said.

"It was kind of fun, I'll admit." said Austin.

"Then help yourself to more. There's no shortage of Pyjaks out there if you get a craving for violence. I'll give you a discount at my store. Anything you want, you buy at cost." said Ratch.

Austin looked at Urz for a moment and noticed that the Varren looked a bit hungry. What was wrong with feeding him? The Helldiver

bought some of the meat and once again stepped up to Urz.

"Here. Try this." said Austin as he put the meat down in front of Urz.

The Varren instantly took it into its mouth and started eating.

"Wow. He was certainly hungry." Austin thought.

Urz finished eating and gulped the Pyjak meat down. He'd really enjoyed that. To Austin's surprise, Urz then went and sat right next to where he was standing. There was a different look in his eyes. He seemed... eager. In fact he now had that look that a dog had whenever they were waiting excitedly for their master to throw a ball.

"Ha! Looks like Urz finally found someone to follow around!" said Ratch. There was a brief moment of pause as the Krogan noticed the new look in Urz's eyes. "Say, human. He really likes you, and I can't keep looking after him. It's not healthy for him to be sitting here all the time. You wanna take him?"

Austin was very surprised by this. Ratch was offering him a former pit fighting Champion? He was being offered a pet?

"Are you sure? I'm on a rather dangerous mission. I can't guarantee I can bring him back." said Austin.

"I'm not letting you borrow him; I'm giving him to you completely. He's yours if you want him. Besides, you Helldivers see a lot of action. Urz might prove useful to you." said Ratch.

Austin looked at Urz for a long moment. He had to admit that the idea of having a Varren as a pet. Plus, Ratch was right. Urz was a former pit champion and he was still very far from old. He could definitely prove useful. True they faced well-armed enemies, but that wouldn't be a problem. Just give Urz some armour and he'd be even more lethal.

"Alright. I'll take him." Austin smiled.

"Good, then he's all yours. Look after him." Ratch smiled.

Urz seemed to understand that he had a new owner now and he briefly walked up to Ratch who gave him a goodbye pat on the head.

"Are you sure about this, Shepard? Looking after a Varren isn't the same as looking after an earthen dog." said Kraan.

"We'll manage. Anyway, I'm his owner now so he's my responsibility." said Austin.

"If you say so. Just want you to be sure you know what you're doing." said Kraan. "Although I do admit that having a Varren as a pet does sound exciting. Anyone who tries to get in our way with him around is gonna wish they'd never been born."

Having done enough sightseeing, Austin headed to where the clan leader was.

"Halt! You must wait till the clan leader summons you. He is... in talks." said one of the guards.

Austin looked past the guards. He couldn't see the clan leader clearly, but he could see the Krogan who was talking to the clan leader. This Krogan had a green head crest, a very uncommon sight. He was also wearing Krogan Battlemaster armour with blue glows.

"You know what tradition demands - Clan Urdnot must respond. Your reforms will not go unopposed. You risk appearing weak at a critical time..." he said.

"Shepard." said a familiar voice.

Everyone immediately looked to the sound of the voice. The clan leader stood up from his throne and they now had a proper view of him. There in front of them, was Wrex, his scarred face smiling at the sight of them.

"Good enough?" Austin asked as Wrex pushed the other Krogan out of the way. "Excuse me." said Austin as he walked past the guards.

Wrex and Austin both shook hands warmly, Wrex was even laughing with delight.

"Shepard! My friend!" he said warmly.

"Damn good to see you too, Wrex! It's been too long." said Austin happily.

"That it has. You look well for dead, Shepard. Should've known the void couldn't hold you." Wrex smiled.

Kraan then came into view too. He and Wrex banged fists with one another.

"Kraan, welcome home." said Wrex.

"It's good to be back, old friend." Kraan smiled. "You're chief? Nice!"

"Looks like helping destroy Saren and the Geth has worked out for you. Glad we didn't have to kill each other on Vormire." said Austin.

"Ha! You made the rise of Urdnot possible. Vormire was a turning point for the Krogan. Although, not everyone was happy about it." said Wrex. He looked bitterly at the other Krogan as he said the last bit. "Destroying Saren's Genophage cure freed us from his manipulation. I used that to spur the clans to unify under Urdnot.

"You abandoned many traditions to get your way. Dangerous." said the other Krogan.

Wrex then suddenly head-butted

"Speak when spoken to, Uvenk! I'll drag your clan to glory whether it likes it or not." He said as Uvenk rubbed his head.

Wrex made his way back to his throne and sat back down on it.

"Now, Shepard. What brings you here? How's the Normandy?" he asked.

"Destroyed in a Collector surprise attack. I ended up spaced." Austin replied.

"Well, you look good. Ah, the benefits of a redundant nervous system." Wrex smiled.

"Yeah... humans don't have that." Said Austin admittedly.

"Oh, it must've been painful then. But you're standing here, and you've got a strong new ship. Takes me back to the old days. Us against the unknown, killing it with big guns. Good times." Said Wrex.

"I have a new Krogan as part of my team. His name's Grunt. He has some kind of sickness and needs treatment. We were hoping you might know what's wrong with him." Said Austin as he indicated to Grunt.

Grunt stepped forward and Wrex looked at him.

"Where are you from, whelp?" he asked. "Was your clan destroyed before you could learn what is expected of you?"

"I have no clan. I was tank bred by warlord Okeer, my line is distilled from Kredak, Moro, Shiagur-" said Grunt.

There was something different in Grunt's voice. The Krogan was usually unafraid and confident of anything he said. This time however, Grunt sounded as though he was nervous. Austin could only guess it was because of Wrex. Grunt knew that he was not only in the presence of a very old Battlemaster, but a clan chief and an old Krogan veteran who had served with Austin. Grunt clearly knew to show respect.

"You recite warlords, but you are the offspring of a syringe!" said Uvenk.

"Watch it, Gatatog. That may be true, but he's still my comrade." said Kraan challengingly. Even Urz seemed to growl slightly at Uvenk.

"I am pure Krogan. You should be in awe." said Grunt. Once again, he didn't say it as confidently or boastful as he normally would have. Austin hadn't realised that Grunt would be nervous around his friend.

"Okeer is a very old name. A very hated name." said Wrex coldly.

"He is dead." said Grunt as he swallowed hard. Perhaps that was also why he was nervous. Grunt knew about Okeer's history and perhaps feared of what Wrex would do.

"Of course. You're with Shepard. How could he be alive?" said Wrex.

"Does that name mean anything to you, Wrex?" Austin asked.

"A vicious warlord responsible for many deaths. Who apparently toyed with genetics. A clone undertaking the Rite...?" said Wrex.

"You are considering it? Tan-bred allowed status as an adult? This is too far!" Uvenk objected.

"I'd watch it if I were you, Uvenk. One more wrong word and

I'll tear you apart right here." said Kraan defensively.

Austin really didn't understand how Krogan minds worked sometimes. For a long time he'd thought that Kraan didn't have any respect for Grunt or resented him. Yet here he was defending Grunt like he was a friend.

"You don't have the plates to try." said Uvenk.

"You won't have any plates when I'm done with you! Back down." said Kraan.

"I'd listen to him if I were you, Uvenk. I'm perfectly willing to let him kill you." said Wrex.

That was enough for Uvenk to back down, but the hate was still in his eyes.

"There's nothing wrong with him. He's becoming a full adult." Wrex explained to Austin.

"Wait, he's coming of age?" Austin asked.

"I don't care what aliens call it. Krogan undergo the Rite of Passage." said Wrex.

"Too far, Wrex! Your clan may rule, but this thing is not Krogan!" said Uvenk angrily as he stormed off.

"Idiot." Wrex muttered.

"My thoughts exactly." said Kraan.

"So, Grunt. Do you wish to stand with Urdnot?" Wrex asked.

"You'll let a tank bred Krogan join clan Urdnot?" Austin asked.

"Only because he's with you. After all, you and I killed thousands like him. Not quite as big, but many. Clan Urdnot is strong and the others will do as I say. They see the benefit of my vision." said Wrex.

"What happened if he doesn't do this Rite of Passage?" Austin asked.

"If he was left here, he would be killed. The clanless are not respected. A tank-bred, probably more so. His disposition is what it is, Rite or no. That's just him being a Krogan." said Kraan.

"Okeer didn't tell you that in the tank, did he, boy?" said Wrex.

Grunt simply remained silent.

"What does this Rite of Passage involve exactly?" Austin asked.

"Not for us to say, Shepard? The Shaman will discuss that." Wrex replied.

"This is his choice." said Austin.

Grunt spent a long moment to think about this. The Krogan looked at the whole place for a long moment before he turned back to the others.

"It is in my blood. It's what I am for." he said.

"Good boy. Speak with the shaman – he's over on the second level. Give him a good show, and he'll set you on the path." said Wrex.

As he headed back his throne, he turned to Austin again. "You too, Shepard. How many times have you stepped in a mess for your crew, hmm?"

"Good to see you again, Wrex. You sure you can't come with us?" said Austin.

"Wish I could, but I need to keep these short sighted fools in line. Hunt well, Shepard." said Wrex.

The Shaman was right where Wrex had said he'd be. Unfortunately, Uvenk and his krantt were there too.

"You go beyond yourself, Gatatog Uvenk! The rites of Urdnot are dominant!" said the shaman.

"How do we know it will challenge him? He's unnatural! The beasts of the rite could ignore him like lump of plastic." Uvenk objected.

"They know blood, no matter the womb. Your barking does not help your case." said the Shaman.

"I'll speak for myself!" said Grunt,

"This is the tank-bred? It is very life like." said the Shaman.

The Krogan sniffed Grunt. "Smells correct as well. Your protests ring hollow, Uvenk."

Normally, Austin would try to diffuse this peacefully, but his Helldiver teachings about other species taught him otherwise. Krogan favoured violent and forceful action and they also admired courage.

"I don't care what this idiot says. Grunt has the right to be here." he said.

"There's some fire – and from an alien! Oh, the shame this heaps on those who whine like pups." said the Shaman.

That was good. Austin had made a good first impression on Grunt's behalf.

"If this must stand on ritual, then I invoke a denial! My krantt stands against him! He has no one!" Uvenk objected again.

"Who says we need you, weakling?!" Kraan growled.

"My patience is tested, but Uvenk invokes correctly. Grunt, who is your krantt? Your allies willing to kill and die on your behalf?" the Shaman asked.

"How is a candidate tested if he brings back up on his Rite of Passage?" Austin inquired.

"Not every Krogan can be the strongest warrior. But each must inspire his peers to battle at his side. If the ones who know you best can find nothing worthy in you, you should wander the wastes and die alone before you weaken my clan. said the Shaman.

"You needn't worry about that. Grunt will strengthen clan Urdnot. Name a target and it will a death that will be spoken of for many years." said Austin.

"Well spoken, Helldiver. Most aliens, and some Krogan, do

not understand our ways. I believe this human does." said the Shaman. He seemed very impressed now. Very good.

Despite this though, Uvenk still seemed to want to defy him. "Aliens don't know strength. My followers are true Krogan. Everything about Grunt is a lie." he said.

To everyone's surprise, Austin then head-butted Uvenk right in the face. Normally, that sort of move from a human would simply make him stagger back. But a Helldiver was a different matter. The enhanced strength of Austin's suit enabled his attack to strike with such force that it was easily equal to a normal Krogan head-butt. Sure enough, Austin hit Uvenk with enough strength that it made him fall to the floor. Just as Wrex had done earlier.

Despite this though, it did hurt Austin a bit. Although his suit kept him safe, it still hurt his neck a bit. If he hadn't been wearing his suit, he could've risked doing some more serious damage.

"Don't know how you guys manage it. That hurt my neck a lot." said Austin to Kraan as he rubbed his neck.

Uvenk quickly got back up on his feet. He looked just about ready to kill them all for that.

"You... you dare?" he said.

"Ba ha ha ha ha! I like this human! He understands!" the Shaman laughed.

"I will..." said Uvenk, but he was interrupted as Urz, Kraan and Grunt all growled at him. He didn't scare them. Urz especially looked ready to fight.

"Try it. I dare you." said Austin challengingly as he held Urz just to be sure he didn't start an unnecessary fight.

"You think that just because Wrex favours him that you can order me around?" said Uvenk.

"What the hell is your issue? What have you got against Grunt?" Kraan retorted.

"It's doesn't matter if one of our own made him – he is a manipulation! He may as well be the Genophage in the flesh." said Uvenk.

"The Genophage defines the weak. My bloodline will make us stronger." said Grunt.

"You sound like Wrex, bringing radical change that threatens our core. We have gone too far already." said Uvenk.

"This is about politics. You maneuver like the Citadel Council. Does your krantt also fight with words?" said Austin.

"You dare slander me in such a way?" said Uvenk.

"Impressive. You challenged with words – their natural weapon. And your krantt sees how your position weakens, Uvenk." the Shaman chuckled as he nudged Uvenk very hard.

"Shaman, you cannot decide in his favour! What about Krogan

traditions if you pollute the Rite?" said Uvenk.

That however was the wrong thing to say, as that simply seemed to anger the Shaman.

"You... you dare! I was a warrior before your mother was born! I speak with the authority of centuries. I decide who is worthy. That is the end of it!" he said.

"I withdraw my denial. This will be decided elsewhere!" said Uvenk as he pushed Austin out of the way. He quickly withdrew however when Urz tried to lunge at him. Austin just managed to keep the Varren back.

"Easy, boy." Said Austin calmly as he held Urz back. If it were up to him he'd let the Varren chow down on Uvenk, but he didn't want to risk starting a clan war. Wrex would never forgive him for that.

"You have provoked them. Reason enough for me to like you. They're your problem now." said Shaman.

"Is that Krogan gonna be a problem?" Austin asked.

"He is forbidden to interfere. Will he? During the Rite of Passage, you must be ready for anything, Shepard. From what you've shown me, you will not disappoint." said the Shaman.

"Do we need any special equipment?" Austin asked.

"To begin the Rite, only the candidate and his krantt are required. You love battle, don't you Shepard? The last gasp of a dying opponent? Bring your love of the fight to Grunt's trial, and he will succeed." the Shaman replied.

"We're ready. Let's do this." said Austin.

At the same time, Grunt banged both his fists together.

"Excellent. But before we begin, I will have to ask that Urdnot Kraan does not take part in this. He has already completed his rite." said the Shaman.

"Kraan's..." Austin went to say, but Kraan stopped him.

"Don't try to argue, Shepard. He's right. Besides, Grunt won't truly be tested if he has a Krogan with him that has already passed the rite. It'll look like weakness to the others." he said.

"Exactly." said the Shaman.

"Well, when you put it that way..." said Austin. "Kraan, head back to the Normandy and tell X-5 to come join us."

"Have fun." said Kraan as he walked off.

"Am I allowed to bring, Urz?" Austin asked.

Urz simply remained clam as the Shaman looked at him.

"I must say, I am impressed that you now are now his new master. He was a fine fighter in his time. He will serve you well." "He may participate in the rite. It will allow his old skills to come back to him. I would recommend though that you outfit him with something to distinguish him. Give him some armour too. Now that he's not in the pits, he'll benefit from it." said the Krogan.

"Well then, what are we waiting for?" said Austin.

Urz simply sat quietly as the rover made its way across Tuchanka's wastelands. The Varren it seemed was a lot tamer than Austin had expected. This had also been a relief for Dell who had also been brought down to fit Urz's new battle armour.

Although it had been on extremely short notice, Dell and Sill had quickly managed to make a set of battle armour that was designed specially to be worn by a Varren. It was adjustable, so they hadn't needed to worry about measuring Urz. The armour that Urz was wearing wasn't permanent. Now that Dell and Sill knew about this, they had said that they would get to work and making a much better version. This one had been done in a rush. For now, it would do though.

The armour covered Urz's body, his tail, he had gauntlets around his legs and metallic claws strapped to his feet and he even had a helmet around his head. In fact the armour looked a lot like Gladiator armour. The helmet covered the Varren's face obviously, but it left big gaps for his eyes and mouth. Urz also had a collar fitted. It was a perfectly normal collar and was merely just so that Austin could hold Urz back properly if he needed to keep the Varren under control or be prepared to release him. It occurred to Austin now that Urz would also be handy at interrogations.

"No disrespect, Shepard. But are you sure taking this Varren is a good idea?" Grunt asked.

"It'll be fine, Grunt. Besides, I'd like to see what Urz can do. He's a former pit fighting champion after all, I imagine he'll do well, especially with his new battle armour." said Austin as he patted Urz on the head. The Varren nuzzled him affectionately.

Eventually, the rover stopped and everyone hopped out. A few Krogan guards accompanied the shaman as they walked through the tunnels.

"This is Tuchanka's most recent scar, the last surface city to fall in the rebellions. The key stone was at the heart. It has survived wars and the passage of centuries. It endures - like the Krogan." he said.

They exited the tunnel to find themselves out in an open arena of some kind. In front of them was a massive pillar of some kind. Grunt gazed around the area in amazement.

"If you wish to join Clan Urdnot, you must contemplate the keystone and it's trials." said the Shaman.

"What will happen?" Grunt asked.

"Who knows? You must adapt. You must thrive, no matter the situation. Any true Krogan will." the Shaman replied.

With that, he and the other Krogan went back into the tunnels

and the entrance sealed itself.

Now they were alone.

"Let's get started, Shepard. Hit the keystone." said Grunt as he took out his Claymore.

Austin did the same and unholstered his Revenant while X-5 powered up his shoulder mounted rail gun and wrist cannons. Urz simply growled with excitement, clearly enjoying the feel of Tuchanka's air on his skin.

Austin pressed the keystone and a large block inside the pillar was slowly raised up.

"First the Krogan conquered Tuchanka... and mastered a natural world only we are fit to hold" a Krogan voice boomed.

The raised slab then fell fast and hit the ground. The arena shook for a moment and then settled. Everything was silent for a moment before Urz then started growling. Everyone looked in the direction the Varren was facing. Sure enough, several other normal Varren were heading towards them. This was clearly the first wave of the rite.

"Here they come! I'm ready!" said Grunt.

"Me too!" said X-5.

Urz also seemed to respond with an exciting bark.

The enemy Varren ran at them. Urz roared and charged at them. Almost immediately, he pounced on one and they wrestled while the others continued their charge.

Grunt, Austin and X-5 opened fire. Varren after Varren fell from the constant gunfire.

"Spread out!" Austin ordered.

Austin resorted to using his Revenant in his left hand, Excalibur in the other in case some of the Varren got too close and also his plasma cannon.

All the while he observed how Urz was doing. He was rather surprised.

Urz seemed to fight like made. He also definitely was putting his pit fighting skills to good use. The normal Varren would attempt to bite, but he'd then simply dodge and leap onto them. Urz's teeth were already stained with a lot of blood. Plus, he was completely uninjured.

Austin was beginning to look forward to having Urz as a pet. Besides, how different was it really from looking after an Earthen dog.

More and more Varren came, but they simply fell from gunfire. Grunt and X-5 in particular were having the time of their lives. Finally, the last one fell and they all regrouped. Both Grunt and X-5 were stained with a bit of blood, Urz seemed relatively clean apart from his teeth, claws, and mouth from where he'd bitten the other Varren. Austin meanwhile had quite a bit on him due to the fact that

he'd used his sword. He may have made a bit of a gory mess.

"Let's signal the keystone to continue the right." said Grunt.

Austin did so and the slab was once again raised.

"Then the Krogan were lifted to the stars to destroy the fears of a galaxy, an enemy only we could chase to their lair."

The slab fell again and slammed on the ground.

This time, a large winged beast flew in.

"Crawlers, come to your death!" Grunt yelled.

Austin now recognised the creature as what was called a Harvester. It had a worm like neck and 4 insect like legs. It roared as it landed and then deposited several crab like creatures which were called Klixens.

"Careful. These one's spit fire." Austin warned.

"Then let's give 'em a taste of their own medicine and turn up the heat!" said X-5 as he switched to incendiary rounds. Austin did the same and activated the red holographic incendiary ammo on his gun. He also began charging up a shot on his plasma cannon. Charged shots would most likely do the right amount of damage.

The Harvester roared and took off, leaving the Klixens to fight the 4 of them themselves.

"Urz, stay back." Austin advised.

The Varren obeyed and stayed at Austin side while Grunt and X-5 moved closer. Austin decided that sniping would be a wiser decision from this range and switched to his Raptor, once again turning the incendiary ammo on.

"I AM KROGAN!" Grunt yelled as he charged one of the Klixens.

"Eat my lead, crawlers!" X-5 yelled as he unleaded his guns into the creatures.

Austin simply crouched and sniped Klixen after Klixen. So far it was going well and they were managing to keep them back. That however changed when the Harvester swooped down again and deposited more of them.

Austin fired more and more shots at them, but there were too many this time, and eventually they got too close.

"Get 'em, Urz!" Austin yelled as he drew Excalibur again.

Urz immediately charged and bit hard into one of the Klixen's legs, causing it to screech in pain and to try and desperately shake the Varren off. At the same time, it tried breathing some of its fire onto Urz but it constantly missed and caught some of the other Klixen's and killing them.

Austin chopped, slashed and stabbed as the other Klixen's attempted to breathe some of their fire on him. Naturally of course, it didn't work. If a Helldiver suit could survive being in a vacuum, it could definitely survive fire.

One Klixen attempted to jump Austin but Urz saved him by jumping on the Klixen and biting both its eyes out. The Varren then went for another one and tackled it to the ground.

The fight was long and gory as Klixen after Klixen swarmed them. Eventually though, the Harvester just didn't come again. It was over.

"I hope this next wave is the last one." Austin panted as he pressed the keystone again.

"Now, all Krogan bear the Genophage, our reward, our curse. It is a fight where the only goal is survival!"

"Feel that? Everything is shaking." said Grunt.

True enough, the ground was shaking violently, and this time it wasn't from the keystone.

No! It couldn't be. Not now.

Unfortunately, Austin's worst fears were confirmed. A giant mass burst out of the ground and reared its head in their direction.

"Thresher Maw! Find cover!" Austin yelled.

The Thresher Maw roared and spat acid at them.

Urz also just managed to get into cover as well before the acid hit.

"Smart Varren." said Grunt.

"What's the plan, Shepard?" said X-5 as his shoulder gun fired few shots at the Maw.

"I'm thinking, I'm thinking." said Austin as he tried to think how they could kill the Thresher Maw. At least it was better than that Thresher maw husk they'd had to fight on Ilos. They'd simply been lucky to have some assistance with that.

Nevertheless, even a normal Thresher Maw was bad news.

"Any thoughts, Grunt? This is your Rite of Passage." said Austin as he avoided another bit of acid.

"I've got something, but it'll get messy. Keep it distracted, I need to get closer!" said Grunt.

"Hope you know what you're doing. I need you on this mission." said Austin.

Both Austin and X-5 fired at the Maw to draw its attention. All the while, Grunt got a bit closer. He then started shooting too.

"Over here!" he yelled.

The Thresher Maw looked directly at the tank-bred Krogan and roared. Grunt simply growled and started charging up his Claymore.

"He's crazy!" said X-5 once they both realised what Grunt was going to do.

"He's right. This is going to get messy. I'd get down if I were you." said Austin as he and X-5 ducked. "Stay close to me, Urz"

Urz huddled close to Austin.

Grunt started to run as the Maw roared at him. It lunged as it watched its prey flee. As its mouth engulfed Grunt, his Claymore finished charging and he fired.

The Thresher Maw's head exploded just as it engulfed Grunt completely. Loads of skin and gore were splattered all over the place and its body fell.

Austin, X-5 and Urz slowly looked over cover to see the Thresher Maw's headless body bleeding heavily on the ground. But there was no sign of Grunt.

"Now that's the way to do it!" said a voice.

They looked to see Grunt walking away from the body. He was covered in Thresher Maw skin and gore, but he had a very smug smile on his face.

"Remind me never to piss you off." said X-5.

"That was fun." Grunt smiled as Urz licked some of the gore off of him.

A ship suddenly flew overhead.

"We have company. Good. I want more." said Grunt.

The occupants of the ship stepped out. It was Uvenk. Accompanying him were a few other Krogan from his krantt.

"You live, and you brought down the Thresher Maw. No one has done that in generations. Urdnot Wrex was the last." he said.

"My krantt gave strength beyond my genes. Which are damned good." said Grunt.

"This will cause discussion. I wonder... you say you are pure? No alien meddling in your construction? Just the warlord Okeer?" said Uvenk.

"The best Krogan traits are distilled into Grunt. He's designed to be perfect." said Austin.

"Being designed is the problem. But not made by aliens. And he is truly powerful. This is a tolerable loophole." said Uvenk.

"A what?" Grunt asked, confused.

"A reason to accept you. You are a mistake, but your potential could tip the current balance of clans." said Uvenk.

"You spit on my father's name! On Shepard's name! But now you stop ranting because I'm strong?" said Grunt.

"With restrictions. You could not breed, of course. Or serve on an alien ship. But you'd be clan in name." said Uvenk.

"You talk like he's a thing. You're after his power. You don't really want him in your clan." said Austin.

"Of course not! I didn't really want to cooperate with clan Urdnot, but I had to. Clan Gatatog is on the verge – either of greatness or of joining the dust. I get traditionalist support if I fight you, and reformer support if I back you. Your Rite of Passage tipped that balance, too." said Uvenk.

"If I know Grunt, your answer's coming at muzzle velocity." said Austin.

"You do know Grunt. This Varren is dead." Grunt smiled.

The tank-bred Krogan then charged at Uvenk and knocked him right down.

The rest of the Krogan unholstered their weapons and one even fired a concussive shot at them. The team immediately ducked behind cover, Urz also followed to avoid the shot.

"I think I've just about had enough of this guy." said Austin.

The Krogan were slightly tougher to take down. Uvenk in particular was a real pain due to his biotic barriers. For Austin however this wasn't difficult. A vicious fight followed around the sight as X-5, Grunt and Urz battled Uvenk's krantt while Austin fought the Krogan himself.

Pretty soon, Austin managed to fire just the right shot. Not only did it disable Uvenk's barriers, but it also shot his Claymore right out of his hands.

Uvenk's barriers were down and he was now disarmed.

"Go on then. Finish it." the Krogan growled.

"Oh, I intend to." said Austin as Urz came up behind him, growling at Uvenk and licking his lips hungrily.

"Urz, sic him!" Austin ordered.

Urz immediately obeyed and jumped at Uvenk. The Krogan tried desperately to shake the Varren off, but Urz sank his teeth into his arm. Uvenk screamed as Urz's sharp teeth carved right into his flesh and Urz pulled so hard he ripped the arm off completely.

"Do you want the honours, Grunt?" Austin offered.

"My pleasure!" said Grunt as he aimed his shotgun at Uvenk and blew the Krogan's face apart.

"Uvenk is meat. Let's signal the keystone to get out of her and leave him to rot." said Grunt.

Urz refused to drop Uvenk's arm and continued eating at the meat still on it. Austin guessed that would keep him happy for a while and now Urz also had some bone to chew on. He hoped however that they wouldn't start to smell. Because if they did, he'd have to take them away. The Normandy's cleaners would kill him if the decomposition left a smell all over the place. But Urz's was a fast and very efficient eater. Perhaps he'd eat all the flesh before it got the chance to stink.

They headed back to where the keystone was. Some of the Krogan guards from earlier had now returned. They nodded to Grunt that the Rite was finished.

"You have passed the Rite of Passage, earning the honor of clan and name." said the Shaman.

Grunt then kneeled before the Shaman.

"Many survive, but it has been years since a Thresher Maw fell! Your names shall live in glory. Grunt, you are Urdnot. You may now own property, join the army, and apply to serve under a Battlemaster."

"Shepard is my Battlemaster. He has no match." said Grunt.

"Understood." said the Shaman as he motioned for Grunt to stand again. "Congratulations, Urdnot Grunt. Accept this token from Fortack. His weapons are the finest we have."

"We should go." said Austin.

"May your foes be strong enough to keep you sharp." said the Shaman.

Before they left, Austin went back to Wrex.

"You just can't help making trouble. No one has killed a maw since my turn in the Rite. Next you'll tell me he's a quint and craps dark matter. Guess that's what it takes to replace me." said the old Krogan. "You are Urdnot Grunt. Welcome."

Grunt had been silent after coming back from Tuchanka, but Kelly had noticed an improvement in his mood, and it certainly showed when Austin came down to check on him.

"Urdnot Grunt. I like it. I have a clan. That makes me... it makes me want to fight – not just able to! And Uvenk! I wanted to disembowel him! To tear out his spine like a trophy!" said Grunt.

"Save it for the Collectors, Grunt. I don't want you starting fights on my ship." said Austin sternly. Besides, we did this because you were losing control. Now you just seem as hell bent as ever."

"Wrex said I was normal. I just had all this built up stuff from being grown in the tank. Now that I know it's not an outside thing, and I have a place as a Krogan, I like it. Our enemies are in trouble, Shepard. And we better not run out of targets." said Grunt.

"There's no danger of that. They're practically lining up." Austin smiled.

"Everyone gets a turn. Ha! Wouldn't want it any other way." said Grunt as he banged his fists together.

Austin was glad at least that Grunt was in control now, even if he did still seem eager for nothing but violence. Austin guessed it would only be a matter of time before another member of the team came to him with another personal mission. Sure enough, speak of the devil, Kelly notified him as soon as he re-entered the CIC.

"Major, Mordin would like to speak to you. He seems to have something distracting him from his work." she said.

Austin was beginning to see that everyone was starting to find something they wanted to wrap up. Not that he could blame them. They were preparing for a suicide mission and would need to be

focused if they were to make it out alive. Austin also had to keep reminding himself that Uthenra would be coming aboard in a few days. He still needed to make preparations for it.

Mordin was once again in his lab and was typing away at his console, most likely working on a new project or something. A bit Like Dell sometimes did.

"Shepard. Important news. Know you're busy. Have to deal with Collectors. Planning attack. Too important to wait. Just received data, still processing, analysing likely scenarios. Not sure how to begin. Too much intel. You remember our talk? My work on Genophage modification?" the Salarian asked.

"Hmm, yes. You stopped the Krogan adaptation to the Genophage." said Austin coldly.

He didn't care if Mordin disapproved of him saying it like that. He was still appalled at Mordin for modifying a lethal weapon like that that shouldn't have existed in the first place. In fact it was that event that had prevented the Salarians from joining the Helldivers. The Council had attempted many times to negotiate something with the Arkanes, but they always distrusted the Salarians due to the Genophage and some even thought that they might try the same for them simply to clear up their own mess if it all went to hell.

"Part of a team. Scientists, all different types. Blood Pack mercenaries captured former team member. Maelon. Last seen on Tuchanka. Might torture him. Make an example. Recovering Maelon would be personal favour to me." Mordin explained.

"Do you think they found out your team updated the Genophage?" Austin asked.

"Unclear. No way to determine until we get Tuchanka." said Mordin.

"If only you'd told me earlier. I was just on Tuchanka. Still, we can go back if need be. We'll find your team member." said Austin.

"Appreciate it. My assistant. My student. Want to see him safe. Maelon last seen outside Urdnot territory. Scouts might have seen Blood Pack. Talk to them or clan chief." said Mordin. "In the meantime, will be here trying to determine how scale itch got onto Normandy. Sexually transmitted disease. Only carried by Varren Implications unpleasant."

Austin simply cleared his throat at that. He honestly hoped that this scale itch thing had not been caused by Urz, especially if it was an STD. That was very unpleasant to think of.

Austin decided to have another quick chat with Thane before heading back to Tuchanka.

"Do you need something?" Thane asked.

"Have a few minutes to talk?" Austin asked.

"Certainly." Thane replied.

"If you don't mind me saying, you're what expected. You don't seem like a typical assassin." said Austin.

"In my experience, those who are truly dangerous don't act like they are." said Thane.

"Hmm, that's comforting for me to know." said Austin hesitantly.

"Don't worry, Shepard. I don't think it'll be possible for me to assassinate you without you at least noticing in some way. Helldivers are too smart and self-aware for that." said Thane.

"Thanks... I guess." said Austin. "If you don't mind me asking, how long have you been doing this?"

"The Hanar trained my body for this role since I was six years old." Thane replied.

"You've been killing since you were six?" Austin asked in surprise.

"Of course not. I didn't make my first kill until I was 12. They were training me. I was not to be used and thrown away. I was an investment." said Thane.

"You were a child not an investment!" said Austin sternly.

"I've given you the wrong idea. They valued me. Yes, as a resource. But also as a person. They... regretted their need for me." said Thane.

"Why did your parents agree to this?" Austin asked. He was rather surprised that a family would allow this sort of thing for their child at such a young age.

"The agreement was made under the Compact. It was an honour of our family." said Thane.

"The Compact?" Austin inquired.

"We live on the Hanar homeworld because they rescued us - some of us - from extinction. We owe them our lives. That is the Compact." said Thane.

"This can't be legal. They made your whole race into slaves!" said Austin.

"I understand how you must feel given that you and other Helldiver are trained to fight and end slavery. But I assure you, it is nothing like that. Besides, anyone can choose to serve. Few do. We owe our existence to the Hanar. We are proud to repay the debt." said Thane.

"But you don't kill for the Hanar anymore. You're a freelance. What changed?" Austin asked.

"I was asleep for a long time, yes. I paid no attention to what my body was asked to do. But then-" said Thane. Then something strange seemed to happen. Thane spoke as if he was suddenly remembering something and describing it in great detail. "Laser dot

trembles on his skull. One finger-twitch, he dies. Then the smell of spice on the spring wind. Sunset coloured eyes defiant in the scope. The laser dances away."

Then it seemed to stop. Thane hesitated for a while before he spoke again.

"My apologies. Drell slip into memories so easily." he said.

"Was that one of your assassinations?" Austin asked.

"Ah. Yes. Perhaps we can discuss it later. I've wasted too much of your time." said Thane.

Austin felt it best to try and press the issue and simply left. It did get him wondering about Thane though. What was his story? The Major should try and talk to Thane again when possible and ask about what had just happened.

A TALE OF TWENTY THREE EXTRA

LittlewriterLink
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“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.”

The sun above Mt. Crenel was burning their skin and the wind was whipping their clothes off their backs, the rock faces were steep and dangerous to climb down, yet it was either that or jumping.

“You just had to park at the top, didn’t you?” Wind complained pressing his face against the wall as the wind blew against them, trying to pull them away from the safety of the stone

“I don’t have much control of it.” Spirit replied from below him, his eyes were shut tightly from the wind blowing in his face

“Why can’t you pull over and ask for directions or something?” Wind spoke continuing his climb down the rock face, scratching his tunic on the elbows “You better hope we pick up someone with a sewing kit shoved up their-”

“Wind!” Spirit hissed “It may be a me thing, but asking for directions isn’t really necessary when you have a map.”

“That’s a weird thing actually. Women and maps, have you had this problem?” Wind asked sensing Spirit’s silence was not to be laughed at

“No, I’ve done most of the navigating on my mission. But yes, I’ve seen women can’t read maps very well or at least follow the map anyway. I wouldn’t mention it to them though.” Spirit gagged “How long have you been there, Zelda?”

“Long enough.” Zelda hissed floating down to his face “You were lost in the Twisted Tunnels and you HAD a map.”

“You were saying?” Wind quizzed climbing past him on his right as Zelda’s ghostly figure turned a light shade of red

“Not right now, Zelda.” Spirit winced as if she had hit him over the head with a frying pan; she flew back up the mountain angrily as they

stopped on a small piece of land for a breather. Without any water on them, their throats were dry as bones and their arms and legs were numb from the climb down. How did Minish manage it? Twice?!

“Spirit, can I ask you a question?” Wind whispered, letting his feet dangle over the side of the land

“Okay.” Spirit replied glancing over his shoulder “Can I borrow your telescope?”

“Did you know me well? Before all this started?” Wind asked as Spirit raised the telescope to his eye

“Honestly, I can’t say that I did. Your ship crashed on the reefs outside the Ocean Sanctuary when I was three. You-you never came back.” Spirit sniffed trying to keep his face tear free “Mum left me with Niko while she went looking for you. I’m still waiting for her to come back.”

“Oh...I promise in the future, I won’t go anywhere.” Wind wailed rubbing a hot tear off his cheek and wrapping his arms around Spirit’s neck, Spirit’s shoulders were jumping to hold back the tears

“That’s the problem; you said that to Mum before you left. She said, you said: you made a promise to me a long time ago that you wouldn’t go anywhere. And you did! You and Dad left me and Mum behind!” Spirit screamed pushing Wind back, Wind went pale; his grandson was suffering the same pain he did when his parents left him behind. They remained silent for a little while. Just listening to the sound of the rocks pounding against the land from above; Wind kept his gaze to the floor, watching the dust and sand-like dirt fall from underneath him to the ground below, Spirit had kept his back to him, constantly searching for something in a town on the horizon; a good few miles away.

“We’ve rested enough, we should head further on.” Wind hinted, Spirit nodded and turned to look at him, his face wet with crying silent tears. It was on both their faces. Spirit handed the telescope back and reached out for a ledge to climb onto. Wind caught sight of a scar on the left side of his face under his hair, but decided not to question it, before Wind had a chance to follow Spirit gave him a quick kick in the stomach to push him over across to the other side of the land as a huge red rock slammed into the ground, making it rumble. Wind let out a groan and rubbed his stomach, as he could feel a bruise forming “Spirit?” he asked, but could not hear him or see him past the rock.

Wind leant over the edge of the land and gasped. Spirit was lying flat on his stomach cradling his right arm in semi-conscious. He may not have fallen very far but it was enough. "Hang on, I'm coming!" Wind shouted climbing down the mountain to Spirit's side.

Wind took his hat off and forced Spirit to sit up against him. Making him moan when his arm was moved, his wrist was broken; it flopped like a jellyfish and seemed to have forgotten the life that was in it. Wind made a sling for him out of his hat and uncorked the fairy from the bottle in his pouch; it had changed from its big eyes and huge wings to something much smaller and dainty. She lingered in the air for a moment before settling down on Spirit's knees

"When battle has made you weary, I am at your service." the fairy spoke saluting Wind with her wand

"Any good with broken wrists?" Wind asked holding Spirit's arm up, Spirit grimaced through his half open eyelids

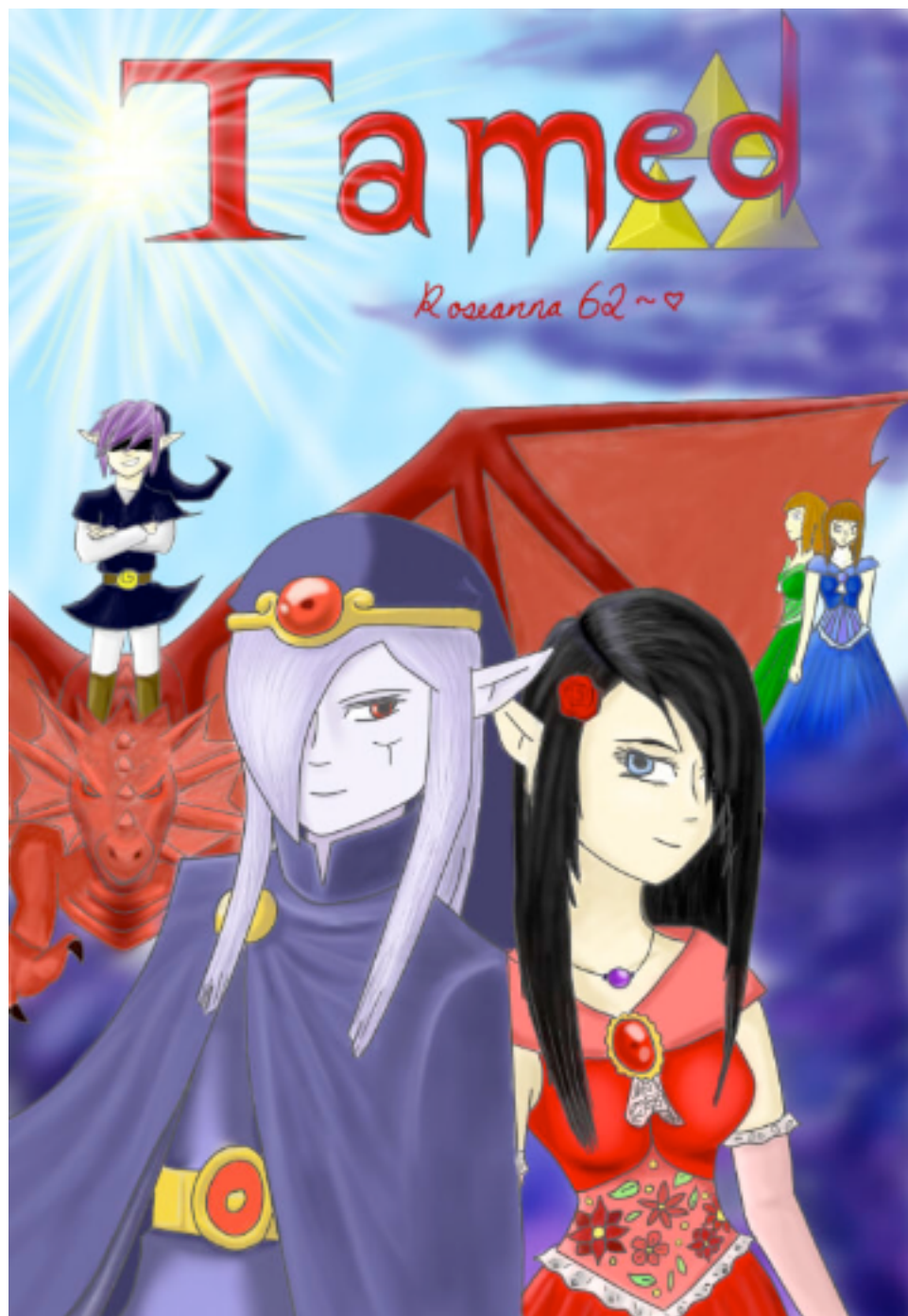
"He'll need to borrow your hat for a little while till the pain fully goes away. Fairies are not meant for those who don't have the Tri-Force." the fairy squeaked as Wind took Spirit's gloves off carefully. The fairy was right. No Tri-Force was housed on the back of his left hand. Even though he knew this, it still shocked him about Spirit's acts of courage.

The fairy cracked the bones back into place quickly with her nimble fingers and let his hand glitter gold for a few seconds and then rose up into Wind's face before vanishing, leaving a trail of silver light in the air for a few moments. Wind glanced back down at Spirit and watched as the smile returned to his face

"Heart-warming moment over!" Spirit chortled rolling out of Wind's grasp

"Typical." Wind sighed helping him up "How will you drive?"

"I don't know!" Spirit laughed throwing his hands in the air



TAMED THE STORM

Roseanna

This is part 1; to read the entire story, go here:
<http://www.fanfiction.net/s/8438263/1/Tamed>

I winced as lightning flashed outside my window, and looked fearfully at the weather outside. How can nature hold so much anger?

"You're not scared are you, Violet?" Jasmine declared from across the bed, her curly brown hair glimmering in the candle-light.

"No!" I said, puffing out my chest, but as soon as the lightning flashed again I hid under the blanket.

"You are scared!" She laughed, and dived under the blanket with me.

"Violet? Scared? That's impossible!" I heard Raven exclaim as she entered the room, and dived under to join us.

"You're nine; you're not supposed to be scared of a big storm!" Jasmine said, and sat beside me.

"They say that when the wind roars outside," Raven growled in a husky tone, pulling an exited face, "You can almost hear the outraged cry of the evil wind mage sealed away many years ago!" I brought in my knees, shaking of fright.

"And what is going on in here?" We all froze when we heard my Mum's voice from beyond our little world. We poked our heads up immediately, and sat up straight.

"Violet was scared of the storm outside, but Raven" Jasmine glared then at her, "Made her even more scared." Raven stuck her tongue at her.

"Well, I would read you a story to help, but it seems there is too much mischief in here." Mum sighed, and brought out our favourite book. We all eyed the book with eager faces, and even I forgot my fears.

"Now which one do you want to listen to?" She laughed, and sat on the end of the bed.

"The Three Friends!" We said in unison, and I leant against the pillow. Mum opened the book, and it immediately fell open on the right page due to the frequent turning to that page.

"Right... Well you all know the legend of a boy in green, travelling across the lands in order to save our ancestor's princess. He fought countless forms of evil, and conquered the man of wind who threatened the city of Hyrule – our capital you know" She said, breaking from the book.

"No! Continue!" We all pleaded, and she rushed back to the book.

"But there are also three young friends, ready for their story to be written. One friend resembles the powerful black bird of the night, fighting for who she cares and against those who threaten. The second is a beautiful maid, courageous and kind, bringing joy to her friends and supporting them when they are distraught. And the third is an odd one, half evil and half good. She holds wisdom of old and fears no threat, yet her even the most evil of spirits will fear her dark side. Together, they are greater than the boy in green himself.

The friends will one day travel across the lands seeking the greatest treasure of all, for one with a healing heart, a mage of the sky.

But be cautious, for if the maid of wisdom turns to the darkness completely, light will be consumed and hatred will purge the land, until the ancestors of old will rescue us from darkness's black hearts."

Six years later

"Violet, could you tie up the horse before you go to school? This weather is making him frightful." Mum called from the window. She was starting up the fire in the house, as winter was dawning and it would be needed to light the furnace later on.

My family's business of sword making was quite successful, seeming as only my grandfather started it in the 17th century. It's been over seventy years now and sometimes even the king requests an amazing sword to be made by my father.

Everyday I secretly practice the way of the sword, as to make one you have to learn how to handle one. But in my village it's forbidden for a woman to fight, let alone give a teenage girl a sword.

"Alright mum!" I sighed. I grabbed the horse's reins and tied him to the post in the stable. I adjusted the strap of my schoolbag, and started walking to school.

I looked up at the classroom ceiling, which now seemed more fascinating than the class itself. I hugged my arms, as a cold draught caught me from the open windows. It didn't help either that the room was made all of stone, so no heat whatsoever was given apart from my own. "So girls, what did you learn from this lesson?" Mr Vernon asked the class, but only two girls put up their hands out of the thirty. I looked at one of them, a tall and slender girl who was, quite frankly, loud.

"Ah, yes." He pointed to her with his cane.

"Our Goddess holds the sacred force, to which is far too powerful for one person." I rolled my eyes. Everyone knew that, he stressed it four times already in the hour that seemed to last a millennia.

"Yes very good. Jemima?" He asked the remaining girl with her hand up.

"Those with tainted hearts seek the sacred force, and in time will be consumed by their own hate if they obtain it." She said casually. That fact I had forgotten. I slouched in my chair, no hope that I would get home early at all today.

"Excellent. Now as for your homework..." He picked up a piece of chalk and started writing on the chalk board, giving off a nasty screech. "You are to write... a three hundred word essay...on where the hero in green found the three sacred forces." He looked at the paper on his desk, the back to the board. "Due Friday."

I groaned, we have already been set three essays and had to revise for two tests. And what's more is that I have to help Dad with a new sword for one of the King's knights. Doesn't school know we actually have lives outside of this one?

"But that's in two days time!" Jasmine protested somewhere in a seat behind me. Of course she would, she's always busy. I hardly get to

come round her house because she's always away helping her grandma get better, or help her mum with the farm.

"Better get cracking then. Now, write that in your diaries." At this everyone hesitantly got out their diaries and started copying what Mr Vernon had written on the board. Suddenly the school bell rang, and everyone rushed out of the room, even Mr Vernon. Only Jasmine, Raven and I were left in the vacant room.

"Come on Raven, can you pack any slower?" I groaned, and I started investigating the teacher's desk. A pencil, some papers, and an apple. I opened a drawer, and found nothing that was out of the ordinary.

"I'm nearly done! Just need to get it in the right order of the books....and done! Kay, let's go!" Raven looked up, her short brown hair flying. "Violet, stop snooping. You'll get caught, and then we're all in trouble." She always nagged me. Sometimes I wondered why I hanged around with her, but I guess the Goddesses made us friends.

"Right." I shut the drawer; there was nothing productive in there anyway. "Jasmine, you going horse riding with me on Saturday, or are you still caring for your grandmother?" I looked over to her, and she was looking out the window. Like Hyrule it had to rain in the summer.

Her hazel eyes shone in the candle light, and I wondered what she thought of now and then. "The rain is red." She said a little startled. It seemed like her eyes were glued to the window, and I laughed. How could it rain red? None the less I still looked outside. My face fell when I saw red streaks running down the glass, and I ran over to it in fascination.

"Whoa!" I looked out the window carefully, and sure enough the rain was falling all over the school. I heard Raven give a small wail of surprise and run over to me and Jasmine, but I was still staring out the window. I heard one girl – through the window – shout the word blood.

"Blood?" I questioned. "How can it rain blood?"

I opened the window slightly and stuck out my hand. In a few seconds I had a few drops on my palm, and I took my hand back in to inspect. I couldn't tell by looking at it, so I tasted it. It did not taste metallic, and was quite thin for blood.

"One: why would you taste it? Two: Is it blood?" Jasmine pressed. I

studied the drops carefully.

"No...but it's not water either..." I snapped up my head to the others. "Let's go to the Quad to investigate." I loved visiting the quad. The large garden felt like a sanctuary, with a fountain in the middle and trees around, and then after that the school walls encircled it. There was a giant chess board which Jasmine and I used to play sometimes at lunch. It was a quick run there, so it was the best place to go.

I ran out of the room, and the others followed behind. We left our bags in the classroom, we would get them later. I turned left in the corridor and ran through a crowd of people to get to the entrance to the Quad. It seemed they had the same idea as us.

I burst out of the crowd of girls, and gasped as I looked up at the clouds. I ran closer to the centre of the garden, closer to the fountain.

The clouds were circling right above the fountain, like a tornado. I licked my finger and stuck it out in the air to see if there was any risk of the suspected weather. "There's no wind..." This was very strange. I looked over to Jasmine behind me, who's had the red rain running down her face.

"I have a bad feeling about this..." She said, and started backing up, away from the storm. "Violet, Raven, we need to get out of here..." Raven started to follow her, fear seeping into both their eyes. But I wasn't going to miss the action, not now.

"You guys go on ahead; I want to know what this is all about."

"Violet, this is no time to act like a heroine, like in the legends. This is real life. Now come on." Jasmine ordered, but suddenly I heard a cracking coming from the fountain up ahead, and I turned to the noise.

I took a step back in shock as I saw that the fountain was freezing. The water shooting up slowly became a crystal statue, and continued to spread. It followed out onto the grass, and I realised anyone caught would freeze to death.

I looked, and saw just one stupid girl not backing up. She was gazing at the clouds and the ice was slowly creeping to her.

"Hey! Hey! Get out of here!" I shouted to her, but the awoken roar of the storm stole my voice. I ran up to her, and took her arm. She looked

in surprise at me, red hair whipping around her pale face.

"You're gonna freeze if you stay here!" I pulled, ready to run, but my feet wouldn't move. I looked down, and I could've sworn my heart missed a beat. I was too late. The ice had already sealed me to the ground.

"What the-"The girl said, and tried to move too, but with no such prevail. The new found wind now screamed in my ears, and rain pounded my face fiercely.

"What's your name?" I shouted into the ear of the girl. I should at least know the name of the girl who led me to my doom.

"Alex! Yours?" She screamed in reply.

"Violet!" It was now freezing cold. Funnily enough, the ice hadn't frozen my body, just my feet to the ground, as if to trap me there.

Subconsciously, Alex and I hugged each other for comfort and warmth. I felt sorry for her, she was trembling from what I assumed was both fright and the cold.

I looked around, I couldn't see anything, just white fog and ice. Even the girl next to me seemed to be disappearing. I looked down to her, but I found that she had gone entirely. Even the storm seemed to vanish all of a sudden.

"Everything is just....gone." I looked down, and saw that my feet had unfrozen too. Was I dreaming? I touched my face, it was still pretty wet. I took a step forward. "Hello? Is anyone there?" No reply. I took a deep breath, and strode forward.

What just happened? I thought. One minute I'm in the quad, and now I'm in this nowhere land. Maybe it's because of that storm.... I was awakened from my thoughts when suddenly through the fog I spotted two floating objects. One long and sharp, the other flat. I knew what it was and I ran up to it. It was a basic sword and shield, undecorated but would get the job done if I encounter any monsters. Monsters were very common around my village, and it was dangerous to go out in the dark alone.

Taking them in hand, I felt a lot more confident. I gave a few test swings, and it cut neatly through the air. My long black (and wet) hair swirled around me, and the thrill of it all gave me the chills.

I took two steps forward, and suddenly a small monster appeared. I crouched down, and waited for it to come closer to examine.

When it came too close I put out my sword lengthways like a barrier, and because it had no arms or legs it could not pass. This little monster was easy to beat, and was basically acidic goo brought to life. Mum told me when I was younger that an evil wizard brought acid to life so to scare the tax collectors and become wealthy by stealing the gold coins they left behind. This little bright green of gloop had small tentacles at the bottom, and unfocused eyes.

"Ooooooh, look what we have here! Very threatening, I shivering right now." I laughed. All he wanted to do was kill me, and I didn't want to die, so I took a swung at him with my new found sword. The goo was cut right in half, and then exploded in a purple puffy cloud.

I took two more steps, when again a shape appeared in the fog. It was a tall and looming silhouette, and I knew if this was another monster, it would be more of a challenge. The heavy drag of armour sounded, and I could see the other person had taken up a battle stance, with the sword held high and the shield protecting the front.

Finally it took one last step and I could now see it fully. It was a darknut, a frightening monster and was hard to beat, if you didn't know how.

The darknut was dressed in full navy armour, and was quite fat compared to a usual knight in armour you would think of. He was the first to attack, and he formed a perfect vertical slash, aiming for my head. I dodged the attack, and immediately swung back. The darknut staggered back in recoil, and came back with more gusto to kill me.

This time he took a lunge, as to which I wanted to try out a famous move I have seen many knights perform. I rolled under the oncoming blade, ending up on the other side of the darknut. I jumped up in the air whilst spinning, my blade following me. I landed back on my feet, and I had successfully removed the back plate of the knight's armour. No wonder it was a common attack.

Now enraged, the darknut took a horizontal slash at me, which I parried with my sword. We came in a clash of swords, like the ones you would imagine in a pirate story. I pushed with all my might, but the darknut was clearly stronger. I was leaning back, and fell over. Seeing his chance, he made an attack for my throat, but I was already gone. I

had slipped under his legs and on the other side once again. Just as he made a stab, so did I.

He fell down, dead, and like the slime earlier he exploded in a puff of purple.

A little short of breath, I flipped my hair and carried on. I now had a hunch where I was, but I wouldn't decide just yet. I started moving forwards again, ready for the next challenge out of this nowhere land.

After a few minutes of silence, a large oblong-like object loomed ahead. I wondered what it was, so I took a step closer. It was three times as tall as me, and looked like it was a mirror.

I took three steps closer, and was now two feet away from the dark tainted glass. It was tall and large, and I had to crane my neck to see the top. The edges were lined with stone, and eyes decorated the surface. Is this what I think it is? I asked myself. It all tried in if it was what I thought, the dark mirror.

"Amazing..." I pressed my fingertip upon the glass, and in a second all the fog disappeared. I could finally see the blue sky, and the sun shining down. But when I looked, I jumped right out of my skin when I saw that I was standing on a cloud. A cloud! Was that even physically possible? And behind the mirror was an amazing castle, made with purple bricks, stained glass windows and trees all around. This too was floating on a cloud.

I looked some more, and now slowly, I could see other girls around me. They were all fighting their own slime or darknut, some running, hiding, or fighting.

"These are the girls who were in the Quad with me!" I looked, and saw Alex, her fiery hair flying as she ran away from the slime. There were other girls whose faces I did not recognise, and then there was Jasmine. She was fighting bravely against the darknut, but her attacks were blocked by her opponent's shield. Her curly brown hair tumbled around her shoulders as she made every movement, her school uniform a little torn.

"JASMINE!" A sigh of relief ran over me as I called her, but she seemed to be unable to hear me, let alone see me. I looked around, and saw Raven, defending herself too from a darknut with a shield.

"They must still be in the fog..." I looked at the mirror. "So this mirror

lifted the fog for me when I touched it?" It must have been a spell, that fog. All these hints indicated where I was. Legends foretold of a castle on a cloud, maintained by the notorious wind sorcerer, Vaati. I looked at the castle, and knew that was the way to go next. I looked over to Jasmine, who was tiring out quickly. Raven was OK for the moment, hiding behind her shield.

I ran over to the darknut Jasmine was fighting, and hacked off the helmet it was wearing. A wrinkly skull of a head stuck out like a sore thumb, eyes boring red.

"Ugh, you're ugly as hell! Here, let me put you out of your misery!" I then swung my sword, and the screech of the darknut was cut short as its head fell to the ground.

"Violet?" Jasmine said with utter shock.

"Nice to see you too. Wait can you see fog around you?" I replied with curiosity.

"Yeah, can't you?" She shook her head, confused.

"Just as I thought, it is a spell. Come on, let me lift it off you." I then grabbed her arm and ran over to the mirror. I pushed her hand on the glass and watched her as she looked in utter amazement at where we were.

"This is beautiful!" She whispered.

"Come on, let's save Raven!" I looked over, and just saw Raven stabbing the darknut right under the helmet. "Scratch that, she's saved herself. Stay here." I then ran over to Raven and dragged her over to the mirror and made her touch it. She was surprised by the sudden tug of her arm but soon just accepted it.

"Whoa!" She exclaimed, the same expression Jasmine had. "It's like heaven here!"

"This is far from heaven, Raven." I warned. She looked at me with a cautious look, noticing my voice turning into a darker tone.

"Violet, where are we?" Jasmine asked, fear creeping in her voice. I sighed. Where should I start?

"You know those legends, telling of a boy clad in green fighting

numerous evils?" They nodded in reply. Many times at school I had discussed it with them. "Well, I think," I paused, "I think, we are in the domain of a man who threatened the world long ago" They gasped at my words, and I now knew that they would be in great danger here if they didn't tread carefully. There were thousands of monsters, and a man more dangerous than being trapped with a pack of hungry wolves..

"Violet, you know the legends, don't you? These girls, we need to help them, or they'll be in great danger!" Raven shook my shoulders desperately.

"I can't save them Raven. I can't save the weak ones, for they will face greater challenges and die a more gruesome death if they have no courage or skill. Only the toughest can survive here. I saved you guys because I can protect you, or at the least help you save yourself if you can't" Raven let go of my shoulders, and looked at the girls with despair.

"So, where do we go?" I sighed.

"I guess we go...In there." I then pointed to the castle.

POETRY

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John Mahler's Quotes of the Day

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/john-mahler/john-mahlers-quotes-of-the-day/ebook/product-20105057.html>

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!

SCREW PERFECTION

Amghala0123
of <http://amghala0123.deviantart.com>

Cover Letter goes here: something about the work, the writer, or whatever else the writer wants to talk about.

I don't want to be perfect,
If it means I can't be me.
I don't want to be beautiful,
If it means I have to wear a mask.
I don't want to be noticed,
If it means I have to hide.
I don't want to be popular,
If it means wearing a costume.

Perfection.
Beauty.
All ways of saying "fake."

Why can't it mean "original."
Why can't it be doing things for yourself,
Reading and writing things that make you happy.

I don't want to be perfect.

I'm allergic to expensive clothes and mounds of make-up.
Offended by too much cleavage and a peroxide blond hair.
Appalled at the sight of another girl's bra through her shirt.
Horrified at poor grinding skills.

Why can't being beautiful mean being you?

DRAGON TALE

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

There is not much more I still desire,
It's a quiet and beautiful night;
Bathing in the heat of a campfire,
We're all gathered up in the starlight.

It feels so warm, in my body and soul,
With these sweet songs, but I hope it's not all
I need a story,
Adventure of epic fantasy.

So let me tell a tale, dragon tale, I will if you ask me;
They are such great beasts;
I will, if you please,
Tell my very best stories.
You wanna hear a tale, dragon tale, come on everybody,
I know you'd love to,
I really want it too;
So here's a dragon tale for you.

Check the bestiaries 'round the Earth
And see how the same creature comes up;
Even way before their cultures' birth,
People talk about how they showed up.

Terrorizing killers and tyrants,
Or protecting watchers and guardians,
Always dazing,
Fascinating, simply amazing.

So let me tell a tale, dragon tale, make you feel the hot fire
Blazing through the skies
And teach you to fly,
Or at least give it a try.
You wanna hear a tale, dragon tale, just a humble desire,
Oh I understand;
They span through times and lands,

When everyone else falls they stand.

They may not always look quite the same,
Yet they're still a constant of cultures;
They may sometimes bear a different name,
But they're still the most common creatures.

Some of them have specialties, hidden skills;
Others love to try and tease, give you thrills.
They always seem
Real yet beyond your wildest dreams.

So let me tell a tale, dragon tale, set us all in motion,
Fly and dart around,
Blazing roaring out;
But that's not what it's all 'bout.
You wanna hear a tale, dragon tale, cross the lands and oceans,
Islands and countries,
To follow their stories
For more secrets and mysteries.

So let me tell a tale, dragon tale, come on everybody;
I know you'd love to,
I really want it too;
So here's a dragon tale for you.

CONFLICTING SANCTUARIES

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

As your last moments come to pass
the Truth becomes like transparent glass
allowing your darkest secrets to be spilled out for all to see
revealing the man behind the mask; your true identity.

Words left unsaid will finally be said without a single plight.
Revealing the acts of horror you committed in the silence of the night
despite your objections, your last breath will be your undoing
as you fight to contain the beast that strangles you from within

your final testament will read:
"I am not sorry I made them bleed.
I watched as their worthless lives receded into oblivion.
My only regret is that I do not know where death leads.
My victim's pleas still ring through the air; sweet music to my ears.
Isn't it glorious that I am in control of what so many of you fear?
Yes; my body will not fade without my consent
as I make my final decent.
But know this; I have one last victim trapped within my grasp
and her time is drawing near."

A young girl's cry rings through the abyss
her final memories of an encounter gone amiss
bones peek through her fragile frame
as she attempts to escape her chains; so helpless and lame.

With one last breath, she wished to die
on the wings of an angelic lullaby
to take her to that sacred place
where dreams come true with but a sigh

and so she rose into the sky
higher than the mountains in the rye
with no time to say goodbye.
And as she passed the murderer's soul
she watched as he was dragged down below
but she did not speak a word
as she ascended through the stars

And as she entered the secret place
where souls redeemed amazing grace
she knew she was in the right place.
But every now and again she stopped to ponder
what had happened to her killer, who was burning below.
She hoped that he had found some peace
at least if that is what he sought
because if things could be done by her beliefs
everyone could experience the freedom she did.

Do you know what will happen when we die?
Will you ascend into the sky
to see the sanctuary with which you have been blessed
addressed as heaven: the eternal home of grace
or down under will you race
as you come face to face
with the victim that you have put into place
and forced to see the home that you have been denied.

Will you find sanctuary in the thing that is death?
Basking in eternity's embrace?
Finding a home in the heavens with the stars
coming to terms with who you truly are?
Can you even go that far?
To say that you are worthy of a home most pleasant
even when we are all filled with sin?
Will you live in the City on a Hill?
Or are you happy with where you are?
The broken home you burned with fire

Which sanctuary do you desire?

WHY?

BlueWolfSam
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Why people hate ?
Why people hurt so much?
Why people lie?
Am I The Only One Telling The Truth?
Why am I so hurt?
Why am I so sad?
Why am I so stupid to trust people?
-More I know people...More I like animals

SHIT

Kela Lewis-Morin

Shit.

I unintentionally use it almost every day.
In a sudden hiccup, I slip up and it slips out.
Even when I can't think of anything else to say.
You can bet beyond a shadow of a doubt.
That exact word will seep and creep out.

It makes its way into any given conversation.
It's probably the most used default abbreviation.
It requires no effort and rolls out with no hesitation.
It's so universal it can be suited to every situation.
In an upsurge it will emerge with no indication.

How can one word have so many definitions.
And still have the same effect despite its repetition.
How can this same word blur all the lines of divisions.
Between polite pleasantries to abusive abrasions of affliction.
How can the tone and meaning change after every rendition.

This word sounds exactly like what it means.
You scream it, shout it and even mutter it under your breath.
No matter how big or little the occasion may seem.
Just unleashing it will take a load off your chest.
You say it when you're inspired, tired, stressed or depressed.
It is what it is, nothing more and nothing less.

WHY DO I CARE?

David McKinstry

My friend, where have you gone?
You left my life with such haste...
That you never said goodbye
It's been a while now
What have you done with your life
These past 9 months?
Are you where you want to be?
It's funny that I care
Because all you seem to be
Is the faded memory
Of an almost forgotten dream

LUCKY CARD

Maria Kubiak

My heart is breaking,
I can hear that crack.
Waking up,
I go the other way back,
Just lost control over my feelings now,
It is so hard,
Maybe this time I will choose the lucky card.
My heart is bleeding,
It stopped beating,
I have to be strong,
All along,
It is so hard,
Maybe next time I will choose the lucky card.