

Fanatical Publishing's

Weekly Review

Issue #61

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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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NEW AGE OF HEROES

THE WAR STADIUM

SaviortoFew of <http://saviortofew.deviantart.com>

They arrived at the Stadium, and found Ares training 2 warriors, a daughter of Poseidon, and Phobos.

They walked to Ares and he said, "I knew sooner or later that I would meet you. Apollo and Athena said that I should train you and Nickolaes when they and Hades die.?"

"Has Chaos attacked here yet?"

"No. So shall we begin?"

"Yes." He brought out his Helios Reapers.

"Excellent. Isalus, you shall duel with Naminas, our greatest female warrior; Nickolaes, you shall be with my son Phobos, God of Fear."

Nickolaes said, "I have no fears."

"Good. Let's begin. Kronos, start the timer."

Kronos, personification of Time, an old man in a giant hourglass, nodded and had a hologram showing 10 minutes to fight.

Naminas, with her water-like hair, blue armor and Poseidon's Trident, ran towards Isalus, but he was quicker and defeated her in 5 seconds, as did Nickolaes.

Ares said, "That was amazing. We will surely-"

Before he could finish that sentence, Chaos wiped him, Phobos, and Kronos out.

Chaos said, "I must say, at first I doubted you and I still do. I guess telling your friend that both of you will die doesn't phase you. I'll let you live. See you at my Lair."

He vanished and Naminas said, "What was that about?"

"Chaos is trying to kill me. I will kill him, though."

"May I come?"

"Yes you can. Would you like some powers of the Gods' Souls?"

"Sounds good."

"Alright. Just let me get the others."

Isalus held out his hand and gained the Souls of Ares, Kronos and Phobos, and shared them with Nickolaes and Naminas. He also shared the Souls of Pan, Hermes, Gaea, Atlas and Aeolus with Naminas.

She said, "Oh my, this feels great. Thank you, Isalus. Now, my father was informed of who you, so he put his Soul inside his Trident."

"Oh, can I see it?"

"Yes."

He held onto Poseidon's Trident and gained his Soul.

Inside the Soul Realm, Poseidon said, "Thank you for taking my Soul, and please take care of my daughter."

"I shall."

Then Apollo said, "You have completed your first task. Now you must find my twin sister, Artemis. Also go to the Realm of Death, collect Thanatos' Soul, and find the Labyrinth. Your mother said that the Bane of Chaos is there."

"Thank you father."

He left the Soul Realm, told Naminas what Poseidon told him, and told Nickolaes of the 'bane of Chaos.'

Nickolaes said, "Wow, well let's get to Artemis."

COLLAPSED

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

Here we are.

Yes, for a while it seems.

Good thing everyone else left. I wouldn't trust the majority of them to be rational if they were in my place.

Is it rational to lag behind to save samples during emergency evacuation?

Those I fetched are important.

Were.

Still are. We have a chance of making it out of here alive, you know.

And why do you not trust the others, anyway? I thought they were scientists like you.

They're robots. They don't think, they just follow protocol and meet deadlines.

I thought your specialty was mice.

And fleas. And they teach me a lot on human behavior. I've even developed a new theory on a possible function of superstition.

Superstition? I thought I was the philosophy specialist.

Scientists and philosophers are similar. They're both thinkers.

Are we the same?

In a way. I deal with measurable and describable things, you explore fields that can't yet be studied.

Yet you are discussing theories and psychology instead of analysing our situation. Most peculiar.

I'm doing both. In case you haven't noticed, your arm and my leg are stuck.

Do you not think we could get rid of them?

The beams or our limbs?

Either.

Our survival "cage" is too unstable. Too much weight on top, few beams with reliable anchorage. The slightest movement could disturb its delicate balance.

So we should not try?

Not yet. The others will surely alert a hospital. We should wait for rescuers. They'll have pairs of steady hands and dogs to sniff us out, not three trembling limbs groping in the semi-darkness for the nearest way out.

I thought you did not trust the others.

I don't. But I trust in Capitalistic policy, exceptionally. If this isn't reported properly, there'll be no financial and material compensation for the company bosses.

Now you are starting to talk like a cynic.

No, it's rational. I've met two of them personally.

And you think you are a philosopher.

I told you, we're similar. If it weren't for peer pressure, I wouldn't be trying to drill into the mechanisms of reality and pretending to understand how nature works.

You make it sound oppressive. Is science not about investigating the unknown?

I've always preferred the unknown of hypotheses and what-ifs.

There is a lot of those in science.

Not in institutional science, no. We're just citizens like any other. We do what we're told, we go as fast and cheap as possible. And we skip safety procedures, because anything not proven dangerous is absolutely harmless.

You make it sound boring.

No. Bureaucracy and capitalism make it boring.

Why did you not choose philosophy then?

I was interested, till 8th grade where my Philosophy teachers put me to sleep. The way they taught, you'd think it's all memorizing the thoughts of the Ancient and pretending to read between the lines.

Can we reflect upon things without knowing about what others said before us?

Knowing doesn't equal memorizing. It's something that bothers me in science, too. Too many words, too much repetition, not enough exploration.

Is that what you do?

I try not to dwell upon it.

That does not answer my question.

Your question is redundant. I've been giving you the answer for at least two minutes.

Fair enough. But repetition makes findings more reliable.

There's a difference between repeating experiments to verify them and repeating old discoveries to make them look new.

Like the difference between a metapopulation and a group of clones?

Hah, who's talking like the other now?

Making analogies is a part of philosophy. I could say, for example, that we are currently like insects with their legs in sap.

Then let's hope no future archaeologists find our fossilized bodies in amber.

I doubt it, considering the feedback from the environment.

Yes, I hear chattering too. And barking. Well, I'm glad we've had this conversation.

So am I. It was... rather thought-provoking. That is rare in our society. One thing we agree upon. Now, let's see if we can draw some needed attention.

I will join you.

LAND OF INSANITY PT4

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

Jonithan only chuckled at my response. "Simple," he replied with a smirk, "I wanted to surprise you." He placed another hand on his nicely decorated, bull-headed cane, then glared at me with his stone cold eyes. "Why did you steal my research?" He asked with such a dark voice, seeming deeper and more demanding than before. The rasp in his voice was gone, which made me shutter a little bit at the sight of him. I couldn't speak. I was frozen in fear. "Tell me, Boy. Who hired you? Why did you steal my research? Tell me!" He yelled at me, dissatisfied as I stuttered, trying to obey his demand.

"I... I didn't d... do it on purpose. I... I was only diving through servers to test their security. I... I didn't know I would find your notes." He sighed a little bit, as he walked around me slowly with an obvious limp in his right leg. I started to think of the possibilities of how he got this. Was it from a war? A mishap with his research? Or did someone try to ruin him somehow? I could probably use this if I thought I was in danger.

"Tell me where the information is now, Mister Lane," he demanded again. I sighed, hanging my head down, looking for something I could use as a weapon.

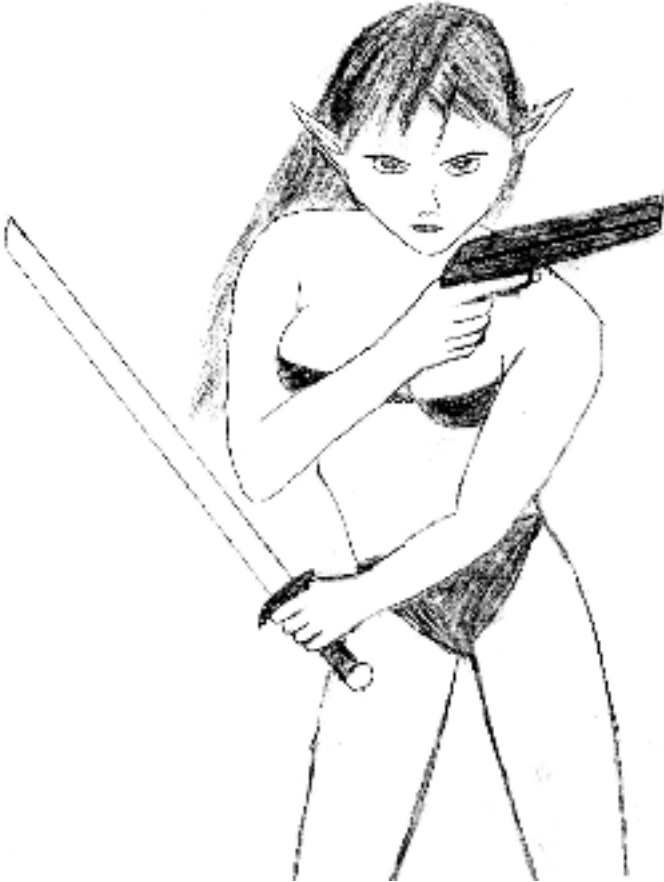
"I destroyed the computer it was on." He stopped walking around, and stared at me. Anger burned in his eyes as he raised his cane and swung it at me. His blow hit my head hard enough that I was dazed for a moment before understanding the warm, slow trickle making its way down my face was blood pouring out of the now open wound on the side of my head. Jonithan mumbled under his breath while he turned around, looming over where I fell. Delicate, crimson splatters burst from chin against the cold concrete floor beneath me. Seeing my own blood, I knew I was in danger.

"You are just like your father in every way. Blonde hair, blue eyes, thin build, no muscle at all. You're all brains, and you both try to find the nonviolent way to get out of problems you have gotten yourselves into. You're pathetic, just like he was." *This man knew my father? But how? He looks so young, and my father has been dead for 15 years.*

"How did you know my father? He has been dead for 15 years." I began questioning him as I stood. While blood was falling from my chin, I reached into my pockets hoping to find something to use as a weapon. I finally found that pen I was looking for in my room; how useful could that be? Yeah. I could stab him with it, but it wouldn't do me any good. Thinking on it for a moment, an idea popped into my head. I took the pen apart in my pocket while keeping my eyes on Jonithan.

"How do I know that whelp? I fought alongside him in the military, 15 years ago. If I had known he had a kid, I probably wouldn't have killed him all those years ago." He chuckled slightly. Hearing him laugh at my father's death irritated me. For the first time in my life, I felt true anger. A great warmth overwhelmed me. Was this rage? Having no control over my body, I charged at Jonithan blindly, holding my pen in hand. A blunt force flung me across the roof of the school. Looking up, the two men from earlier were standing in front of Jonithan. He shook his head, and left. Darkness started to surround me as the two men moved in.

FAN FICTION



or: Leanna's Return

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ME2 HELLDIVER SAGA CHAPTER 28: A VERY BUSY DAY

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Austin simply waited patiently. He was pretty sure that another member of the team would notify him about a personal mission very soon. He hoped though that would be now rather than later. Today was the day that Dell's wife, Uthenra was coming aboard the Normandy for her wedding anniversary with her husband and daughter. Arrangements had already been made for the Normandy to dock at the Citadel and for Uthenra's shuttle to dock there too.

Just as Austin was debating on whether he should give the crew some shore leave, EDI's avatar appeared in front of Austin's deck.

"Let me guess, EDI. Someone wants to talk with me?" he asked.

"Yes. Mr Vakarian would like to see you when you have a moment, Shepard." EDI replied.

"Garrus?" Austin asked, this time with concern.

"Yes. He recently received a message that got him extremely tense." Said EDI.

"Tell him I'll be down right away." Said Austin as he quickly got up from his chair

Garrus was at his usual post in front of the forward batteries. He immediately acknowledged Austin as the Helldiver entered.

"Shepard. I'm glad you came. I've got something I may need your help with. You remember Sidonis? The one who betrayed my original team? I've found a lead on him." He said. "There's a specialist on the Citadel; name's Fade. He's an expert at helping people disappear. Sidonis was seen with him."

"Then where do we find Fade?" Austin asked.

"I've arranged a meeting. We'll meet him in a warehouse near the Neon Markets, down on Zakera Ward. Thanks, Shepard. I appreciate you taking the time to help me." Said Garrus.

The Citadel was mostly busy as usual. Garrus knew specifically where the meeting was, so they didn't need to worry about asking Bailey where Fade might be. As they neared the place however, Austin overheard a rather strange argument.

There was a Volus and a Quarian who seemed to be arguing with one another. A C-sec officer looked like he was trying to sort it out, but he wasn't doing a good job.

"This clanless is a thief, and I want her arrested!" said the Volus

angrily.

"What?! I was just walking by!" the Quarian objected.

From the look of her suit, and the sound of her voice, the Quarian was a young woman on her pilgrimage.

"I'm sorry, I'm trying to take a statement here." said the C-sec officer as Austin stepped in to try and settle this.

"There's nothing to talk about! She stole my credit chit. Arrest her!" said the Volus.

The Quarian however still objected.

"I did not! Just because I'm a Quarian-!" she yelled.

"I need you to stop and take a breath." the officer said.

"You're mocking me, Earth-clan! Just because the Vol-clan need-" said the Volus.

"It was a poor choice of words, sir. I apologize." the officer quickly interrupted.

"You say you're falsely accused?" Austin asked the Quarian, whom his suit identified as Lia'Vael.

"I was walking to the used ship dealer when he barged into me outside the Sirta Foundation. He didn't stop or say he was sorry. A minute later, he runs up with C-sec and accuses me of stealing his damn chit!" Lia explained.

"Maybe the chit simply fell out when you bumped into each other?" Austin suggested.

"I guess. Sure. All I know is, I didn't take it." said Lia.

"Do you spend a lot of time at the used dealer?" Austin asked.

"Yeah. They've got a lot of nice models. I'd like to buy one and take it back to the Fleet, but..." said Lia, but she hesitated at the last bit.

"Your Pilgrimage isn't going well, is it?" Tali asked sympathetically.

"No. I—I came here thinking there'd be a lot of work. EVA stuff. Salvage. Fixing all the damage the Geth attack caused. Everywhere I went to apply, signs said "Not hiring Quarians." And the other people would give me mean looks." Said Lia.

"Do you know who's telling the truth?" Austin asked the officer.

"My omni-tool can tell the Quarian doesn't have a chit on her. But she could have stashed it to recover later. You know what Quarians are like. And she's definitely a vagrant. I'll run her in and see what Bailey wants to do with her." He replied.

Tali however did not take kindly to this and immediately objected.

"The hell you will! She's not a vagrant. She's on Pilgrimage. It's tradition in which--"

"Look, you can take your traditions and cram them. Every time a Quarian shows up here, it's trouble." The officer interrupted.

"He's right. You can't turn your back on these clanless Quarrians. Thieves, all of them." Said the Volus.

Tali looked just about ready to hit the Volus and stood right up to him. She looked down on him due to his small size.

"Quarrians are only forced to steal when people like you won't let them have real jobs." She said.

"And to think my taxes pay to support you here. Go back to your fleet, clanless." Said the Volus.

"I am clan Zorah, crew of the starship Neema. And you are an idiot." Said Tali.

"My first instinct was to help you. But I don't like your attitude." Said Austin as he crossed his arms. If this guy was constantly going to discriminate the Quarrian, why side with him. He could even be just trying to get Lia arrested simply because he didn't like her.

"I don't like the company you keep." Said the Volus.

Austin nearly lost his temper with that one and he glared down at the Volus, his hand curling up into a fist. The Volus seemed to notice this and he did shiver slightly. Pissing off a Quarrian was one thing, pissing off a Helldiver however was very different. They had certain restriction freedoms that normal citizens didn't have.

"Do I look like I'm looking for your approval? No!" said Austin very coldly.

"Hey! Both of you, calm down." Said the officer. "Kor Tun, I know you're upset, but that's no excuse to insult everyone around you."

"My brain agrees. My gut says I should jack his suit's olfactory filters so that everything smells like refuse." Said Tali.

"Remind me never to get on your bad side." Said Garrus, trying his best to hide the laughter in his voice. Admittedly, even Austin found it hard to suppress a little chuckle at that. Perhaps he could get Tali to do that behind her back so the Volus wouldn't see.

"Are you sure you didn't leave your chit at the Sirta Foundation?" Austin asked the Volus.

"Of course not! You think I'd make a mistake like that?" Kor Tun objected.

"I certainly do." Said Tali.

"I didn't even buy anything there. The chit stayed in my pocket." Said Kor Tun.

"I'll see if I can find out what happened." Said Austin.

"Sir, this is a C-sec matter. We'll do all we-" the officer said before Kor Tun interrupted him again.

"Bah!"

"All we can do to resolve this. We don't need civilian help. If you do happen to find the chit, please let one of our officers know." He finished.

Austin decided to start at Saronis Applications, since it was the

closest shop. It was being run by a Salarian.

"Welcome to Saronis Applications. Can I interest you--" he said, but he stopped as soon as he saw Austin properly. "Ah! Shepard!"

"Do I know you?" Austin asked, slightly confused.

"No, but I know you. Even a senile Hanar would remember the Helldiver who fought off the Geth! I thought you were dead?" said the Salarian.

"Yeah. I've been getting that a lot. Let's just say that news of my death was... rather premature." Said Austin.

"Please, look around the store. It's a pleasure to have you here." Said the Salarian.

"A Volus was in here not too long ago. Did he drop a credit chit?" Austin asked.

"Oh! Yes. He bought some environmental system drivers, then left without his chit. I didn't notice he'd left it until he was already gone. If you see him, tell him I have it here behind the counter." Said the Salarian.

"Thanks for your time." Said Austin.

That had been very quick, but at least now they knew where the credit chit was and it proved that Lia was innocent and had been falsely accused.

"Please move along." Said the officer.

"You forgot your credit chit at Saronis Applications. The clerk is holding it for you." Austin said to Kor Tun.

"Oh. Well. The Quarian could have stolen it." Said the Kor Tun.

"I'll close this event report." Said the officer. He then turned to Lia "But I'll be watching you. Get a permanent residence, or I'll run you in for vagrancy."

"Are you two serious?!" said Austin.

"What?" said Kor Tun.

"You falsely accused this girl of stealing from you. All you have to say now is that she "could have" stolen it?" said Austin angrily as he gave Kor Tun a rather hard push which was so hard it made him fall flat on his backside.

"Now just a min-" Kor Tun tried to say.

"Shut up!" Austin interrupted. He then stood back up and seized the officer by the throat. "And you. She gets harassed and insulted by this guy, and you throw in a threat to arrest her for vagrancy?"

"How about I run you in for obstruction of justice?" the officer threatened.

"Sure... if you want a dissolved head." Austin responded as he activated his shoulder cannon and it's targeting laser aimed right at the officer's head. "Besides, you're gonna "run in" a Helldiver Major, and a former Spectre? I think both of you should get out of here."

Austin let the officer go and both he and Kor Tun reluctantly left.

"Son of a..."

Lia was left rather lost for words as she watched the two leave and she then turned back to Austin.

"Thank you. I—I wish I could give you something more than words." She said gratefully.

"What the hell was that C-sec guy's problem? He had no evidence that you did anything wrong." Said Austin.

"I don't know. Everyone's been like that since I got here." Lia replied.

"The Citadel has never been tolerant of Quarians on Pilgrimage. The Geth attack two years ago must have made it worse." Said Tali.

"Are you going to be okay?" Austin asked.

"I guess. I have somewhere to stay, so I should be alright." Lia replied.

"Good luck, Lia'Vael." Said Tali.

"Thanks, Tali Zorah." Said Lia.

Now that this incident had been taken care of, they could get on with Garrus' mission.

"This looks like the place." Said Garrus as they arrived at the warehouse where Garrus had arranged to meet Fade. Inside, there were two Krogan bodyguards. Then rather surprisingly, a Volus came out from behind some crates.

"Fade? You're not how I imagined you." said Austin.

"Looks can be deceiving." said the Volus. "So... which one of you wants to disappear?"

"I'd rather see you make someone reappear." Garrus replied.

"Ah... that's not the service we provide." said the Volus.

"Make an exception. Just this once." said Garrus as he pulled out his gun and pointed it at the Volus.

"Damn it! Quick... shoot them..." the Volus stuttered.

Before the two Krogan bodyguards could react however, Austin and Ventra both shot them in the head and they fell dead.

"Too slow." said Ventra as he holstered his bow.

"Why do I even bother?" the Volus sighed in annoyance.

"We're looking for someone. A client of yours." said Austin as he stepped right up close to the Volus who now looked up at him in fright.

"Not mine. I'm not Fade, I just work for him. Sort of." he said very quickly.

"I knew it." said Austin.

"Well then maybe you'd like to tell us where to find him." said Garrus.

"Yes. Of course. He's in the factory district, works out of the old

prefab foundry." said the Volus.

"I know the place." said Ventra.

"Uh... he's got a lot of mercs there... Blue Suns. Harkin thinks they're protecting him." the Volus continued.

"Harkin?!" said Garrus in shock.

"How did Harkin become the Fade? Last time I met him, he was too drunk to even walk." Austin asked.

"Well, he got fired from C-sec for drinking on the job. But he still knows the system. He used his knowledge of C-sec to make people disappear, then he made himself disappear." the Volus explained.

"Interesting. But it changes nothing. We still need to find him before we can get to Sidonis." said Garrus.

"Well then, let's go pay Harkin a visit." said Austin as he cracked his knuckles.

"We'll need to go to the transit station. I can get us to him from there." said Ventra.

"So I... I can go?" the Volus asked nervously.

"Sure, but if we don't find Harkin, we'll be back for you." said Garrus.

"Oh good." the Volus breathed a sigh of relief as he left.

The trip towards the factory district was long due to the size of the Citadel, but it was comfortable. Garrus remained unusually quiet during the trip and so did Ventra. Austin had decided to swap Tali with Sarah and so the N7 marine was now accompanying them. The sky car finally settled down and everyone got out. Sure enough, there were several Blue Suns mercs and Harkin himself.

"There he is." said Austin.

"Shepard?" said Harkin in shock.

"Hello, Harkin. How's the neck?" Austin taunted.

"Don't just stand there... stop them. Stop them!" Harkin ordered as he fled while the Blue Suns took cover.

"Run all you want, Harkin! We'll find you!" Garrus yelled.

Shots flew all over the place, as did arrows. The Blue Suns mercs of course barely managed to land a shot before they fell.

"Harkin's going to regret this!" said Garrus as they carved their way through mercs and mechs.

Almost an hour passed as they fought wave after wave of Harkin's hired thugs. Ventra in particular was actually enjoying this and had even said that he'd never had so much fun using his bow in a long time.

Eventually though, they managed to catch a break and found themselves in what looked like the final room before they found

Harkin. In the room ahead was a lot more containers, and a lot of them where placed up high. Very good places for the enemy to hide, and also very good vantage points.

"What is Harkin up to?" said Ventra.

"You both worked with Harkin at C-sec?" Austin asked.

"Yeah. He was a pain in the ass back then, too. But I'm in no mood for his games. If he doesn't cooperate, I'll beat him within an inch of his life." said Garrus.

"You seem to be getting tense, Garrus." said Ventra concernedly.

"Harkin may know why Sidonis wanted to disappear. If so, he knows why we're here and I don't want him tipping Sidonis off." said Garrus.

They observed the room in front of them a bit more. For a brief moment, they saw something in the distance move.

"Did you see that?" Garrus asked as they all went into cover and out of sight.

"I saw something." said Austin.

"He's getting ready for us." said Sarah as she unholstered her N7 Typhoon.

"Let's not disappoint then." said Ventra as he took another bow from his back and drew the string on his bow back.

"We're right behind you." Said Austin.

As soon as they entered, they were blocked by several more mechs and a few other Blue Suns heavy's. Ventra managed to shoot a few down with some arrows, but even he had to get into cover eventually had to go into cover with the others.

Harkin had attempted to try and delay them by raising up several of the platforms. It hadn't worked to well of course. All they had to do was climb over the edges.

"Aw crap!" Garrus swore. "Two heavy mechs incoming!"

Sure enough, overhead where two Heavy mechs being brought in on cranes.

"Do you really think you can take me down, Shepard?!" Harkin taunted.

"Ventra, take the one on the left down!" Austin ordered.

Ventra immediately complied and aimed an arrow at the crane carrying one of the mechs. He fired and the crane blew apart in a small explosion. The still folded up mech dislodged from the crane and fell to the ground. At first it looked as though it would fall on the other mech, but it instead hit the ground near the mech instead.

The mech was momentarily distracted, but quickly turned back to the Helldivers. Ventra was quick to react however as he pressed one of the buttons on his bow. The arrow heads inside his quiver where

quickly changed to EMP ends instead of the usual spear heads he used. He quickly drew the arrow back and let it fly.

The arrow lodged itself straight in the mechs head and it spasmed violently as the electromagnetic pulse fried it's systems.

"You'll never make it!" Harkin yelled as he raised up several sections of the floor to try and cut off all access to him. Despite this though, he only ended up making easier for them since the left side had formed into stairs.

Austin indicated to the other side. Garrus simply nodded as he understood.

Harkin looked around trying to see where they'd got too; it looked as though his trick of raising the floor had worked, but his moment of relief was short lived as the door to his right opened to reveal Austin, Sarah and Ventra. All of them had their weapons trained on him.

"You were close, but not close enough." he said.

Before he could head for the door however, he found his face instantly meeting with the butt of Garrus' assault rifle. He clutched his nose in pain as the Turian pinned him against the wall.

"So, Fade... couldn't make yourself disappear, huh?" said Garrus.

"Come on, Garrus - we can work this out. Whaddaya need?" said Harkin, doing his best to remain calm. He knew how aggressive and forceful Helldivers would get when it came to interrogations.

"I'm looking for someone." Garrus replied as he gently allowed Harkin to be released again.

"Well, I guess we both have something the other one wants." said Harkin.

Garrus however was in no mood for that sort of answer and he kneed Harkin in the crotch very hard. Austin could help but wince slightly at that.

"Ouch. That had to hurt. Maybe you should just tell us what we need to know." he said.

"Maybe. I still haven't heard what you want." Harkin groaned in pain as he slowly got up.

"You helped a friend of mine disappear. I need to find him." said Garrus.

"I might need a little more information than that." said Harkin.

"His name was Sidonis. Turian, came from the-" Garrus explained before Harkin interrupted him.

"I know who he is, and I'm not telling you squat!"

"Is this information really worth all the trouble? This doesn't have to get hard and be a repeat of last time." said Sarah.

"Screw you, Shepard." Harkin retorted.

"Say that to my sister again and I'll break your nose!" Austin

threatened.

"I don't give out client information. It's bad for business." said Harkin.

Just as he finished however, Garrus knocked him against the wall, threw him to the floor and then put his foot down on the human's neck, pressing down slowly, but very hard.

"You know what else is bad for business? A broken neck!" said the Turian.

"Alright! Alright! Get off me!" Harkin chocked.

Garrus hesitated for a long while before Austin put his hand on the Turian's shoulder and he calmed down.

"Terminus really changed you, huh, Garrus?" Harkin coughed as he got his breath back.

"No, but Sidonis... opened my eyes. No arrange a meeting." Garrus ordered.

"I'm going." said Harkin.

He walked up to a console and activated it. "Yeah, it's me. There's a chance your identity may be compromised."

The reply came in the form of an odd buzzing sound. Obviously designed for secure channels.

"That's why I'm calling. I'm sending an agent. Where do you wanna meet?" Harkin replied back.

More of the buzz followed as Harkin listened.

"Alright. They'll be there. Don't worry - I got it covered." he said. He then finished and turned back to the three Helldivers and N7 Marine who'd been waiting.

"It's all good. He wants to meet you in front of Orbital Lounge. Middle of the day. So, if our business is done, I'll be going..." he said.

Before he could leave however, Garrus grabbed him by the collar.

"I don't think so. You're a criminal now, Harkin."

"So what... you're just gonna kill me? That's not your style, Garrus." said Harkin.

"Kill you? No. But I don't mind slowing you down a little." said Garrus as he aimed his gun at Harkin's leg.

Harkin thought at first that he was going fire, but the Turian then lowered his weapon. Harkin's breath of relief however was short lived as Garrus stepped aside and Ventra pulled an arrow out of his quiver and fired it right into Harkin's knee.

Harkin screamed in pain as he fell to the floor again, clutching his bleeding knee which now had an arrow sticking right out of it, and a bit of bone since the arrow had snapped it completely.

"Maybe give C-sec a blood trail to follow." Garrus finished.

"Bastard!" Harkin swore in pain.

That however was then met with a swift strike in the face from

the back of Austin's hand.

"You're getting off easy, Harkin. Just be thankful that he let you live." said the Helldiver.

"What did I ever do to you?" Harkin replied.

"Sidonis better be there, or I'm coming back to finish the job." said Garrus.

"And look at this way. You'll be able to say the phrase "I used to be the fade... then I took an arrow in the knee." said Ventra.

He and the others then left, leaving Harkin on his own.

The sky car gently touched down, but no one got out yet. They were waiting for Garrus to tell them what to do. This was his mission after all.

"Harkin's a bloody menace. We shouldn't have just let him go. He deserved to be punished." said the Turian.

"I'm getting a little worried about you, Garrus. You were pretty hard on Harkin." said Austin.

"You don't think he deserved it?" Garrus replied back.

"Maybe, but it's just not like you." said Austin.

"What do you want from me, Shepard? What would you do if someone betrayed you?" Garrus replied back, a bit more forcefully this time.

"I'm not sure, but I wouldn't let it change me." said Austin.

"I would've said the same thing before it happened to me." said Garrus.

"It's not too late. You don't have to go through with this." said Ventra as he put his hand on Garrus' shoulder.

"Who's going to bring Sidonis to justice if I don't? No other Helldiver, but me, knows what he's done. Nobody else cares. I don't see any other options." said Garrus.

"Let me talk to him." said Sarah.

"Talk all you want, but it won't change my mind. I don't care what his reasons were, he screwed us... he deserves to die." said Garrus.

"I understand what you're going through - but do you really want to kill him?" Austin asked.

"I appreciate your concern... but I'm not you." said Garrus.

"This isn't you, either." said Sarah.

"Really? I've always hated injustice. The thought that Sidonis could get away with this... Why should he go on living while ten good Helldivers lie in unmarked graves? I'm sorry, Shepard. Words aren't going to solve this problem. I need to set up." said Garrus.

He looked around for a brief moment before indicating to a certain spot.

"I can get a clear shot from over there."

"You just want me to get into position?" Austin asked.

"Not you. It'll have to be Sarah. If Sidonis sees two Helldivers he'll panic and flee. I may never find him again if that happens." said Garrus.

"Understood." Sarah acknowledged.

"Keep him talking for a minute. When I've got him in my sights I'll let you know. Give me a signal so I know you're ready, and I'll take the shot. You better go, he'll be here soon." said Garrus.

The Turian left the car and it continued to ground level. Garrus meanwhile unholstered his sniper rifle and got into position.

"Sarah, can you hear me?" he asked into his comlink.

"Loud and clear." Sarah replied as she exited the sky car. Austin and Ventra stayed behind so they'd be out of sight.

Garrus scanned the area until he finally saw his target. Sidonis was sat on one of the benches and waiting nervously.

"All right. There he is... wave him over and keep him talking." he said.

Sarah got Sidonis' attention and he came up to her.

"Let's get this over with." he said.

"You're in my shot. Move to the side." said Garrus.

"This won't take long at all." said Sarah as she reluctantly moved to allow Garrus to aim.

"You one of Harkin's people? I don't remember seeing you before." Sidonis asked.

"That's it. Just keep him talking a few more seconds." said Garrus.

"I was told Harkin was one of the best. This better not happen again." said Sidonis.

Sarah was now conflicted. Should she let him do it, or try to reason with him? It was a tough call. The same sort of thing had happened to the unit she'd led on Krelldoor, only she hadn't wanted revenge since Shadow had already died. Still, this Turian had betrayed not just Garrus, but the Helldivers in general. It really was a tough call for her. What would her brother do in this situation? As soon as she asked herself that question though, the answer just seemed to come to her.

"Listen, Sidonis. I'm here to help you." she said.

"Don't ever say that name aloud." Sidonis whispered.

"I'm a friend of Garrus. He wants you dead, but I'm hoping that's not necessary." said Sarah as she did her best to stay in Garrus' shot and prevent him from firing.

"Garrus? Is this some kind of joke...?" Sidonis asked in surprise.

"Damn it, Sarah. If he moves, I'm taking the shot." said Garrus.

"You're not kidding, are you? Screw this. I'm not sticking around here to find out. Tell Garrus I had my own problems..." said Sidonis.

As he turned to leave however, Sarah immediately stopped him.

"Don't move." she said.

"Get off me!" Sidonis shouted as she made Sarah let go.

"I'm the only thing standing between you and a hole in the head." said Sarah.

Sidonis now knew that a sniper was watching him.

"Fuck." he swore. "Look... I didn't wanna do it... I didn't have a choice."

"Everyone has a choice." Garrus retorted angrily.

"They got to me. Said they'd kill me if I didn't help. What was I supposed to do?" said Sidonis desperately.

"Let me take the shot, Shepard. He's a damn coward." said Garrus.

Sarah however kept stalling. Austin would most likely have done the same in her place and it was him after all that had taught her to see the good in other, even if they didn't show it.

"That's it? You were just trying to save yourself?" she said.

"I know what I did. I know they died because of me, and I have to live with that. I wake up every night... sick... and sweating. Each of their faces staring at me... accusing me. I'm already a dead man. I don't sleep. Food has no taste. Some days, I just want it to be over." said Sidonis regrettably.

"Just give me the chance." said Garrus. He now sounded hesitant however.

"You've got to let it go, Garrus. He's already paying for his crime." said Sarah.

"He hasn't paid enough. He still has his life." Garrus snarled.

"Look at him, Garrus. He's not alive... there's nothing left to kill." said Sarah.

"My men... they deserved better." said Garrus.

"Tell Garrus... I guess there's nothing I can say to make it right..." Sidonis sighed.

Garrus hesitated a while longer before he finally spoke again.

"Just... go. Tell him to go."

"He's giving you a second chance, Sidonis. Don't waste it." said Sarah.

"I'll try, Garrus. I'll make it up to you somehow." said Sidonis.

"Thank you. For talking to him"

"I know you want to talk about this, Shepard... but I don't. Not yet." said Garrus as he re-joined the others. Austin and Ventra had seen everything.

"I know it didn't go the way you planned, but I think it's for the best." said Austin reassuringly.

"I'm not so sure..." said Garrus.

"Give it time." said Ventra reassuringly.

"Yeah. Maybe that'll be enough. I want to know I did the right thing. Not just for me - for my men." said Garrus. "They deserved to be avenged. But when Sidonis was in my sights... I just couldn't do it."

"The lines between good and evil blur when we're looking at people we know." said Sarah.

"Yeah. There was still good in him... I could see it. It's so much easier to see the world in black and white. Grey... I don't know what to do with grey?" said Garrus.

"You've got to go with your instincts." said Austin.

"My instincts are what got me into this mess." said Garrus.

"Don't be too hard on yourself." said Sarah as she patted Garrus on the shoulder.

"Thanks, Shepard. For everything." said Garrus. "Let's get going. I need some distance from this place."

Today was a very big day.

Today was the wedding anniversary of Dell and Uthenra Arturus, and she was coming aboard very soon.

Austin had insisted that the ship be cleaned an awful lot and be tidied up for her arrival. From what Dell had told him of her, she was a rather insistent woman. While she would prefer the extra effort put in though, she'd still approve regardless.

Nevertheless, Austin wasn't taking any chances. The cargo hold in particular had been given a lot of cleaning and Sill had spent nearly all day getting all her welding finished early so that she could help with the cleaning.

Some of the other members of the crew had been a bit cross with having to do some of the work, but they hadn't complained. Austin had also advised the crew and the team that they treat the day as any other. Austin was a bit concerned about some of the less social crew members.

After nearly two hours, things were looking good. The Normandy now looked factory fresh and the entire cargo bay looked cleaner than it ever had. For now, there was nothing left to do now but wait until Uthenra arrived. The Normandy was currently still docked at the Citadel so that Uthenra's shuttle could dock at the same place and she would have no trouble getting on board.

Austin spotted Sill currently hanging upside down from the ceiling and appeared to be just adding one or two very last minute finishes to her welding work. She appeared to have earphones in and was listening to some sort of song.

"We're caught in a trap! I can't work out... because I love you too much, baby!" she sang along.

"Sill? Sill!" Austin called.

Still no reply. It was like to trying to get the attention of a young

teenager. Then again, Sill pretty much was that, despite her age.

"We can't go on together... with suspicious minds!" Sill continued singing.

"SILL!" Austin yelled.

Fortunately, that was enough for the young Arkane to hear and she stopped welding and removed her earphones.

"Oh, sorry." she apologised as she slowly hopped down from the ceiling using her harness. The way she moved was quite impressive. She had this grace, almost like a gymnast and she seemed very agile.

Sill finally settled back on the ground and unclipped her harness.

"Where'd you learn to do all that exactly?" Austin asked.

"I do it as another hobby. When I was a little girl I was... well, quite energetic. For a while, I did gymnastics in order to stay fit." Sill smiled.

"I'm looking forward to meeting your mother. From what you and your father keep telling me about her, she sounds like a very fine person." said Austin.

"I'm more nervous to be honest. It's not that I think she won't like you and your squad; I'm just worried what she might think about the non-Helldiver crew. Some of them are a bit..." said Sill.

"I know what you mean." Austin finished. "Your dad's worried about X-5; I'm more worried about Urz."

"I don't see why. As far as I know, mom has nothing against Varren. Urz is trained and he's also quite tame. I'm sure it'll be fine." said Sill reassuringly.

"Well, I hope so. And I think we'll find out very soon. Her shuttle docks in a few hours." said Austin as he looked at his omni tool's watch.

All was in order. Nothing now but to simply wait until Uthenra arrived. Austin and the rest of the crew were simply waiting patiently for Dell and Sill to return with Uthenra since they had gone to the shuttle ports to meet her. Austin admitted he was nervous, but at the same time he was rather excited about meeting her. Dell and Sill had always spoken very highly of her and he knew how respected Uthenra was as a teacher. In fact, all the alien members of Alpha Squad had been taught by her, except for Liara and Garrus of course.

"Nervous?" Austin asked Liara who was sat next to him.

"A bit, but not much. I'm sure she'll be very nice to meet." the Asari replied.

"I think she'll enjoy meeting you too. She knows the stories about me and I'm sure that she'll encourage a relationship like ours. She wants all species to work together after all. A romantic relationship is even better." said Austin as he held his girlfriend's hand.

"Are you trying to put me in a good mood for something? If you wanted an evening with me, you only had to ask." Liara smiled.

"Actually I was wondering if you were interested in another duel perhaps. It's been a while since our last one." Austin replied.

Liara was a bit surprised by this at first, but it wasn't in an unwelcome way. Austin was right after all. They hadn't sparred together for weeks now since last time. It wouldn't hurt to do another one.

"Okay. I don't see anything wrong. Can we have something a bit more romantic though for the setting though? Be nice to take our minds of things and just to think about our love." Liara asked.

"I don't see anything wrong with that. In fact, I think I might have just the right location. We'll do it later today after Uthenra leaves." said Austin.

Liara simply smiled and planted a kiss on her bond mate's cheek. At that moment, EDI then appeared out of the CIC panel.

"The Arturus' are at the airlock." she said.

"Okay. Just act natural, everyone. Treat this day like any other." said Austin as he took a deep breath.

The door slowly opened and Dell and Sill stepped in. They were then quickly followed by Uthenra herself.

The female Arkane wore an extremely long dress or robe of some kind unlike her husband and child. What was visible of her skin showed that her skin tone was a much darker green than Dell's was. Despite her mantis appearance, she did have a rather beautiful look to her. The mandibles on her mouth also didn't seem to chirp like a lot of Arkanes did. She'd obviously found a way of keeping a straight face.

Uthenra looked around the Normandy with a very curious and interested look on her face. She looked quite keen to look around and see where her husband and daughter were working.

"This is main deck which is where the CIC is." said Dell as though he were giving a tour.

"An interesting use of co-development." said Uthenra as she looked at Arkane and Alliance designs that had been incorporated into the Normandy. She then saw Shepard and Liara.

"And I don't think any introductions are necessary, wife. I'm sure you know who this is." said Dell.

"The great Major Austin Shepard. I've heard a lot of about you." said Uthenra.

"A pleasure to meet you finally, Miss Arturus. Dell and Sill have told me a lot about you." said Austin warmly as he shook Uthenra's hand.

"Hmm, I'm sure they have." Uthenra smiled.

"So... happy wedding anniversary, I guess." said Austin.

"Thank you, Shepard. And thank you for allowing me to come

on board for it. It means a lot to all three of us." said Uthenra.

"So, shall I leave you three to it? No doubt you will want some time just to yourselves." Austin asked.

"We would like that. Although I wouldn't mind talking with you later. Perhaps you could join us for dinner?" Uthenra offered.

"I... Okay, I don't see anything wrong with that." said Austin.

Since their guest would be mostly occupied until dinner, Liara and Austin decided instead to move their sparring to now rather than after Uthenra had left. Austin had told the crew that they could have shore leave on the Citadel. All of Alpha Squad and most of the crew would naturally be at their special private room there, so that ship would mostly be empty apart from a few crew members that chose to stay.

Neither of the two bothered with using their armour for this sparring match, even though they would be using the simulator again. Liara was wearing a thin, but tight fitting Asari commando outfit which seemed to match the exact same one she'd worn for a brief time on the original Normandy before finding a proper set of armour. Austin meanwhile had stuck to something similar and had topped it off with a hoodie. He'd though about wearing his N7 one that he'd been given by Sarah a few years back, but decided against it in case it got torn.

Liara was already doing a small bit of practicing when he arrived.

"Shall we then?" he asked.

Liara nodded and Austin began keying the location and such into the simulator. Within seconds, the large arms hummed into life and the familiar sight of the Normandy's cargo bay disappeared. In its place, assembled the stunning views and vistas of none other than the Asari homeworld Thessia.

Liara looked at Austin with a happy surprise on her face.

"Well, you said you wanted somewhere peaceful and romantic." Austin shrugged.

Another environment then started building around the couple and soon they found themselves in a very familiar place.

"Our home?" said Liara in amazement.

They were inside a simulated replica of the home that Liara had been left by her mother. The two had stayed there a few nights after Benezia's funeral.

"Brings back a few good memories doesn't it?" Austin smiled.

"That it does." Liara smiled happily. To the Helldiver's surprise, she then unzipped her suit ever so slightly to reveal some of her cleavage, which her outfit did so little to hide due to her large breast size. Austin did his best to not get distracted by it.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Consider that a small reward for making me happy. Want some more? You're gonna have to fight for it." Liara smiled naughtily as she

went into a fencing stance.

"I was hoping you'd say that." Austin smiled back as he drew Excalibur from his belt and also went into a fencing stance.

He attacked first. This time he didn't hesitate on being gentle. Liara had already proven to him in their last fight that she could wield a blade just as well as he could, and he had also put the damage restriction on for this session. All that did was prevent and serious harm or injuries. It only affected organic matter however, so things like weapons, objects and clothes could still be torn or destroyed.

Liara blocked each swing and strike and parried the last one as she pushed it aside with her own sword. Quite impressive.

Austin gave a nod as he acknowledged that Liara's skills had certainly improved a lot now. Not that he had doubted her; she had after all fought two Cerberus Phantoms single-handedly with her sword.

The two did nothing for a long while and simply circled one another. Austin gave a small grin as Liara once again went into a fencing stance. She couldn't help but grin back though as they once again clashed blades. Due to some of the furniture and other things in their home, it wasn't easy to avoid knocking into things and tripping over them. Liara seemed to gain the upper hand and pushed Austin back against the wall. She attacked and attacked until she finally got an opening and she swung. The tip of the Asari's sword put a very long tear in on the left side of Austin's hoodie.

Liara gave a rather smug smile and remained in a fencing stance as Austin looked at the tear in his hoodie and indicated it to Liara.

"Nice attack. Shame though, I rather like this hoodie."

Liara just simply shrugged as she continued smiling smugly.

Not wanting to cause any more tears in the hoodie, despite that it wasn't his favourite, Austin threw his sword into the ground so that he could take it off. Liara got the message and allowed her lover to remove his hoodie. She sort of did the same and using her own sword, which had once belonged to Austin before he had received Excalibur, to cut away the arms on her commando outfit. She didn't care about the outfit being torn or ruined. She'd worn it right now for that exact reason. Austin was unable to resist staring at Liara's exposed flesh.

"Eyes up here, Austin." Liara smiled. "You were the one who told me to never take your eyes off your opponent."

"That I did. And yet you too can't stop staring at my face." Austin smiled back.

"I chose a very handsome man as my bond mate." Said Liara.

"Perhaps even a future husband?" Austin asked suggestively.

"Maybe. All you need do is ask." Liara replied.

"I made a promise, and one day I'll honor that promise. But for now, we still need to remain focused on stopping the Collectors." Said

Austin.

"When that day does come, I'll make sure we both remember it forever." Said Liara.

"Anyway, shall we continue?"

Liara nodded and Austin took Excalibur into his hand again and pulled it out of the ground. Liara instantly attacked first and sparks flew as their swords connected once again. It was almost as though both swords seemed to regard one another as twins. After all, they had both been used by the same master, the only difference was that Excalibur had been used a lot longer than the training sword had and it was even more special due to its Kartalrium forged blade and the fact that it's master's own name was inscribed upon it.

It was only a belief, but Austin had at times thought that perhaps Excalibur was special. It wasn't like a normal sword. Austin had used it for more than an entire decade and the sword had practically endured all sorts of things that would be hell for normal swords. It had even survived his re-entry into that planet when he had died. It was actually starting to be strange. Was the blade really forged from Kartalrium, or was it something else? No metal in the galaxy, not even Kartalrium, was known to be able to survive entering a planet's atmosphere.

Austin however simply pushed these thoughts aside and let his mind shift back to Liara as he continued blocking her attacks and attempting some of his own. Blade struck against blade as both opponents tried to land another strike on one another.

Liara went for a low lunge at Austin, but the Helldiver parried it almost instantly. Liara however twirled around on the spot and attempted another lunge as she once again faced Austin. It was only a few strikes however, before Austin caught her off guard and managed a low swing at her chest. There a was a faint ripping sound as Excalibur cut through Liara's outfit and there was now a long cut across one of her breasts. It hadn't been deep enough to cause a cut, so Liara wasn't in any pain from the strike.

She looked down at the long opening across her breast and then back at Austin.

"Not bad." She smiled. Austin also smiled rather cheekily at what he'd done.

He then did his own parry and both he and Liara ended up in blade lock with one another. It was up high at first, but Austin then moved it to waist height. Both he and Liara simply looked at one another, they were both close enough to kiss.

"Not bad at all." Austin smiled slyly.

The Helldiver then pressed his lips right against Liara's and kissed her. The Asari was really taken back by this and pushed Austin off.

Austin simply chuckled as Liara once again attacked and he blocked. Liara however had been rather unfocused by the kiss and she let a small bit of aggression fuel her attacks which Austin was able to turn to his advantage. He managed to make another carefully executed lunge which made another tear in Liara's commando outfit. This time, it was around the arm section and it was on the same side where he had cut across her breast. A piece across Liara's shoulder fell away and she now had a whole part of her shoulder and part of her breast exposed.

Austin couldn't help but grin at his work, but this only seemed to make Liara all the more competitive. She attempted another lunge, but Austin only grabbed her blade and pulled her right up close to him. She struggled but to no avail as Austin once again pulled her into a kiss.

The Helldiver once again chuckled as he let Liara go.

Now Liara put even more aggression into her strikes and she was even able to surprise Austin when her hardest strike knocked Excalibur right out of his hand.

The Helldiver backed away slightly as Liara kept her sword trained on him. He didn't want to accept defeat that easily. However, that didn't change the fact that he was now unarmed, and Liara wasn't. Despite this though, he acted casual.

"This will make it more difficult." He said, as he tried to figure something out. "Liara..."

But the Asari refused to back down and she once again went into a fighting stance with her sword pointed straight at him. Austin however knocked it aside and ran to grab a large ornament of the wall. Since it wasn't real and just part of the simulation, Austin didn't need to worry about Liara disapproving of it. After all, she knew that part of Helldiver training was to use the surroundings to their advantage if they could.

Liara lunged several times, but Austin was able to block each attack with the ornament. Liara lunged again, but this time, Austin had enough time to bring the ornament into just the right place for Liara's sword to get trapped. The Helldiver quickly seized the opportunity and pulled. Liara's grip wasn't tight enough and the sword slipped out of her hands.

Without a weapon, Liara ran to pick up the only other weapon that was available, Excalibur. Just as she went to grab the handle however, a foot stood on the blade.

"I don't think so." Said Austin as he pointed his blade at Liara and forced her to gently stand up.

Liara couldn't really see any other way she could get out of this without cheating. She could of course use her biotics, but she knew that her bond mate often disapproved of an unfair sword fight.

"Don't move." Said Austin as he stepped back slightly.

Liara was rather confused by this bit. What was he doing?

Austin simply looked at Liara's outfit. Oh how tempting it was to do what he was thinking. He knew that his bond mate would most likely never forgive him for this, but in the end, he just couldn't help himself.

Liara simply watched as Austin made several swipes with his sword at her. Despite this though, they didn't seem to hurt her at all. All that could apparently be heard was the sound of several light tears.

Austin stood back slightly and admired his work. Liara was left rather confused. As far as she could tell, nothing had happened. Her thoughts however were interrupted when there was a loud ripping sound and the entire upper portion of her outfit fell off of her body in rather small pieces.

Liara immediately gasped in shock and rather hurriedly picked up the blanket that had been laying on the bed in an attempt to cover her now exposed breasts. As the Asari turned back to face her boyfriend, she found him right up close to her. She did her best to keep her cool though. To be honest, she was incredibly embarrassed that Austin had managed to strip her with her own sword.

"Do you surrender?" Austin chuckled as he stared into his girlfriend's eyes. Being this close to her always did spark something in him.

"Never." Said Liara. "But I may scream."

"I understand. Sometimes I have that affect." Said Austin, somewhat seductively.

"Prove it then." Liara smiled. "Kiss me."

Austin didn't even hesitate and both he and Liara kissed.

THE MASK OF HAPPINESS

CHAPTER 3

ReizYouUp of <http://reizyouup.deviantart.com>

The Happy Mask Salesman and Tsuki were still flying way overhead Hyrule Field. Night had dissapeared into the reaches of the skys and the fresh green earth was now visible. They were still talking over certain matters.

"So, you're name is Sato?" asked Tsuki. "Doesn't that mean "sugar"?"

"Yes, it does." replied The Happy Mask Salesman. "My mother named all three of my brothers. She named my brothers after their futures, but since she could not see into mine, she simply called me her "sweet" little Sato."

"My mother named me, too... Or so I heard."

Her voice wavered for a moment, and The Happy Mask Salesman was about to ask what was wrong, as he sensed something amiss when Tsuki looked down at the ground. Two small dots could be seen on the surface as they neared Hyrule Castle Town.

"Look, travelers!" cried Tsuki, as she pointed out the two dots.

"Seems as if they're heading towards Kakariko Villiage." said The Happy Mask Salesman.

They were right over the sign leading up to the castle and it was time to land. The Happy Mask Salesman lowered the "reins" and the magic carpet went down. He placed the carpet in his mask bag. The drawbridge was already open as they entered the town.

The hustle and bustle of Hyrule Castle Town was apparent everywhere they went. The town was filled with eager people buying things in market stalls, while some stood around having murmers of conversations. Each and every resident was filled with a joyful disposition that clearly displayed the fact that they were not expecting anything out of the ordinary to happen that day. They reached the mask shop where the happy masks shop's frown greeted them.

"That's a strange sign..." said Tsuki, craning her neck to see it more clearly.

"Yes, thank you." said The Happy Mask Salesman as he reached for the doorknob.

A pulsating motion ripped through his arm as the air appeared to split into waves in front of him. All at once, the mask shop began to transform. The wall of the shop went up in flames. The mask shop's sign slumped even further into a frown as it melted. The Happy Mask Salesman saw himself and Tsuki cornered and frightened by

wreckage. Then a face came forth from the ashes and lunged for the both of them.

The Happy Mask Salesman let go of the doorknob and the visions retreated. He turned to face Tsuki, the worry etched in his face.

"We must get out of here. Something terrible is about to happen!"

"What? What are you talking about?" asked Tsuki, confused.

She reached out and touched the doorknob. The Happy Mask Salesman saw a shiver went down her spine as the new vision was released.

"Woah, we need to get out to get out of here." she said afterward.

"First, I must gather a few things from the shop." He opened up the door and walked in, Tsuki following close behind.

Masks of all kinds were on display in the shop, including the one that looked like the face from the vision. Tsuki approached it.

"Is this a ReDead mask?" she inquired.

"Its called the Spooky Mask." said The Happy Mask Salesman as he headed towards the backroom.

He took a few masks from a special case. A mask with a dark square in the center, a mask in the shape of a dog, and a mask that was reflective; almost like a mirror. Tsuki watched as The Happy Mask Salesman hurriedly gathered them all up and placed them in his bag, then they both walked out.

The residents were still unsuspecting of what was to come as they made their way across town. There would be no warning from either Tsuki or The Happy Mask Salesman to help the townspeople. They exited Hyrule Castle Town as quickly as they came.

"We should return to my uncle." said Tsuki, once they were outside the gates.

"No, we should head for Termina." The Happy Mask Salesman argued.

"What are you talking about? I told my uncle I would return to him soon."

The Happy Mask Salesman was about to interject, but suddenly they were interrupted by the sound of hoof beats. He looked back towards the town and saw a large white horse coming straight for Tsuki.

"Look out!" he shouted as he grabbed her.

The two of them fell off and straight into the town's moat.

"What did you do that for?!" yelled Tsuki.

In that moment, dark storm clouds came across the sky. Lighting and thunder split the air. The Happy Mask Salesman held onto Tsuki tighter. Both could sense that trouble was amiss. Neither

dared to climb out of the moat. More hoofbeats went by, and a child's scream could be heard. A splash was heard right by them.

"What is this?" Tsuki held up the object. "Now they're throwing trash at us, too?"

"It looks to be an ocarina." said The Happy Mask Salesman.

He took the ocarina in his own one of his own hands so that both him and Tsuki held it. Both could sense the object's great importance.

"I'm not sure why..," said Tsuki. "but I think we should hold on to this."

The dark storm clouds began to lift, and Tsuki placed the ocarina in her robe. The sun once again shone brightly as the two lifted themselves out of the moat at a side that travelers could not see.

"I am now going to my uncle's. If you are not coming, then I will go on my own."

"You sure are one stubborn woman. Fine. I will follow you." The Happy Mask Salesman pulled out the magic carpet from his mask bag and unraveled it.

"Oh, no!" Tsuki outcried. "Its all wet and ruined! The magic carpets my uncle makes are dry-clean only!"

The Happy Mask sighed. "Then we will have to walk."

Just then a child in green clothes walked by them.

"Excuse me," said The Happy Mask Salesman. "you seem familiar."

"Why were you in the moat?" asked the child. He craned his neck to see what they were carrying.

"None of your business. Wait. I remember you. You were the boy in my mask shop who never returned that last mask. Do you know what I am going to do to you now?!" The Happy Mask Salesman opened his red eyes.

The boy took a few steps back in fear.

The Happy Mask Salesman's eyes closed, and his grin became smug. "I'm not going to allow you back in my mask shop until you return that mask of mine."

The boy nodded his head. With the anti-climactic moment passed, he went on his way. The Happy Mask Salesman and Tsuki went towards the desert.

XX

"Well that was weird." said Link to no one in particular.

Young Link had just gotten zapped by the king of the desert, Ganondorf's powers. He headed towards the moat to retrieve the item that Zelda had thrown.

"Where is it?" he asked to who appeared to be no one, once again.

A blue ball of light appeared on Link's shoulder. "I don't know." said Link's fairy, Navi. "Listen! Let's just go and see what's up at the castle. We'll figure this out, later."

Link crossed the bridge and entered the town. All the townspeople seemed frightened and scared. The dark storm clouds climbed high over the town again. At that moment, the Gerudo king of the desert appeared once again. Link drew his sword.

"Where is the ocarina of time?! he ordered.

Link found himself seized by the ankles. "I don't know what you're talking about! Two travelers had an ocarina, but they went towards the desert!"

Suddenly, eight Gerudo women appeared from the shadows with baskets. They surrounded the town square. Out popped eight ReDead that split the air with their loud, piercing screams. The Gerudos also carried torches and set the houses aflame. Link could only watch as the town burned in to ashes.

Ganondorf turned to one of subordinates. "Iayisha! Take yourself and the rest of the women to the desert!"

"Yes sir." said the head Gerudo.

XX

Sakon and The Curiosity Shop Owner neared the place where they were to meet Kaiden's men. They were to meet them where the great Impa used to live.

"Right on time! The guard isn't at his post right now." he turned to Sakon. "Just let me do all of the talking, okay, Sakon?"

"Whatever." Sakon replied.

They opened the door and walked in.

"PUSH!" yelled a voice from a cell door.

In the room was a cell with five different men in it. A live cow was placed in front of the back doorway blocking the exit.

"Wait, a live cow?" said Sakon.

"I said no talking!" shrieked The Curiosity Shop Owner.

A woman with white hair and a katana blade jumped down in front of them.

"What are you doing here?!" she exclaimed. "You are trespassing!"

"And what are you doing using a cow as a door stopper?" asked Sakon. "Don't you know that that's animal abuse?"

The woman relaxed a little bit. "Oh, you mean Muriel? Don't worry about her, she's perfectly fine. I've trained her well. Thank you

for being concerned, though."

"Who are you?" The Curiosity Shop Owner interjected, gripping his sword for assurance. "This house is open to the public."

"Not anymore its not. I am Impa, and I am reclaiming this house as my own." Impa stepped forward, looking at The Curiosity Shop Owner's holster. "I should be asking you why your are carrying such weapons."

"Its perfectly normal for travelers to carry weapons."

"Oh, really?" said Impa in suspision. "Do you not know these men that I have captured?"

"Yes! He knows us!" yelled a voice from the cell. "Its me, Kaiden! We have your shipment." He pointed to a few packages in front of the cell.

"No, I have no idea who those men are." The Curiosity Shop Owner lied, nervously.

Suddenly, a yawn of a small girl was heard from above. It startled everyone. She came down the stairs slowly. She carried herself like someone who was above her age. She spoke half to Impa and half to everyone else.

"Strange. I had a dream while I was sleeping. I remember two figures coming towards a house. They danced and were merry. Then both went towards two pairs of gleaming red eyes. One managed to shield himself from them. Then both were dragged towards dark storm clouds."

She approached Sakon and The Curiosity Shop Owner.

"I think this dream symbolizes you two." she reached out her hand. "My name is Zel-"

"Ahem!" Impa interrupted.

"Sheik. My name is Sheik."

"Wait a minute." said The Curiosity Shop Owner. "She looks nothing like a Sheikah!"

"The Sheikah are pale when young." said Impa.

"I've seen Sheikah children before, before the great war. They look nothing like that!"

"Stop trying to distract from the matter at hand!" said Impa.

"You are obviously in league with who I caught!"

"Oh?" said 'Sheik'. "Who are those men you caught? Was I sleeping when you did so?"

"Yes. There was quite a fight while you were out." nodded Impa.

The girl seemed solemn. "Well, it does not matter if you capture those two others, anyway. The jail is small and is not a permanent place. Yes, it will certainly be a difficult time during his reign."

"During whose reign?" asked Sakon.

The girl and Impa exchanged looks. "Ganondorf." they both said.

"Who?" asked The Curiosity Shop Owner.

"Do not worry Sheik." said Impa, ignoring him. "I will have the guard come back and take the prisoners away. He will take them to Ganondorf's palace."

"In that case," said The Curiosity Shop Owner. "Can we take these off of your hands?" he motioned towards the wine cases.

"Well, I suppose you can." stated Impa. "There seems to be nothing wrong with the cases, and we have no real evidence you are in league with these men."

"Thank you. We will be taking our leave now. Come on, Sakon."

"You can't leave us here!" yelled Kaiden.

The Curiosity Shop Owner picked up one of the three cases and Sakon was left with the other two. With the cases in their hands, they were out the door.

"Do you really believe those two were innocent?" asked "Sheik".

"Not one bit," said Impa. "but the jail cell is too full."

XX

The two thieves had just made it outside Impa's house and had set down the wine cases. Sakon sat on one lazily as The Curiosity Shop Owner checked another's contents.

"So what so "special" about this wine anyway?" Sakon asked.

"Well for one thing, it gets you really drunk." The Curiosity Shop Owner responded. "The other thing is that this wine is called the Death Wine."

"The Death Wine?"

The Curiosity Shop Owner closed one of the wine cases and held only one bottle of green liquid, which he was examining closely. "Yup. Thieves, mercenaries, and other villains use it when they're about to be tortured or killed. It gets you very drunk with only a few sips so that you can't feel anything."

"So that's who you're selling it to?"

"That and delinquent teenagers. It gets you very drunk with only a few sips so that you can't feel anything."

"But how does it taste?" Sakon said, eyeing up the bottle.

"Never ask a dealer the quality of his shipment. I doubt you would get a straight answer."

"How do you know its any good, then?"

"I'm sure its fine. They don't put a high price on it for nothing."

"Maybe I could test it out for you." Sakon looked at him greedily.

The Curiosity Shop Owner looked over Sakon like he was crazy. "If you think I'm going to let you drink any of this for free, you're an

idiot."

Sakon lifted his hands up in the air and sighed in defeat. "Well alright then, but don't come complaining to me when the drunk teenagers can't stand your crappy wine."

The Curiosity Shop Owner thought this over for a moment. It couldn't be that hard to let Sakon taste the wine. He needed to make sure it was right for his customers.

"Fine," he conceded. "I'll let you have a sip. But only one!"

"Great!" yelled Sakon, not wasting a single moment snatching the bottle out of his hands.

Sakon took a sip. Then another.

"Hey!" called The Curiosity Shop Owner. "What did I say?!"

"This tastes like crap." Sakon said.

"What? No. You're lying!"

"Here, taste for yourself." Sakon handed him the bottle.

The Curiosity Shop Owner tasted it himself.

"Bleh!" he cried. "This does taste terrible. I've been jipped!"

"Well what are you whining about? You got it for free! Oh, wait. You need to keep drinking it. It takes more than one time for the wine to taste good."

"But you just said it tasted like crap!" The Curiosity Shop Owner took another sip. Then another. It still didn't taste any different. Then he felt his legs wobble. He fell over with a great thud.

Sakon walked up to the now inebriated Curiosity Shop Owner. "May I have that bottle, please?" he asked.

"Meh, I don't care. Take whatever you want."

Sakon once again took the bottle from his hands. He sipped the bottle up himself and started to feel different. He felt a numbness travel up his hands and feet until it was all over his body. Then he too began to stumble and fall. To his surprise, he didn't feel a thing.

"Hey. I can't feel any pain. I am invincible!!" Sakon yelled in his drunkenness.

He went over to show The Curiosity Shop Owner.

"Look!" Sakon punched himself in the gut. Then he realized something. The Curiosity Shop Owner couldn't feel any pain, either.

He began punching him in the face. The Curiosity Shop Owner responded by meekly waving Sakon away with his hands. "Stop it!" he said.

Sakon felt hyper. Absolutely giddy. Still, he was sober enough to know that he wanted to steal some of the wine for himself. He grabbed a crate, skipped, then tripped, got up again, then headed towards his hiding place.

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!

A NEW DAY

Zorveska of <http://zorveska.deviantart.com>

Watch me fly,
Watch me soar.
I've got something
You can't ignore.

Forget the hate,
Forget the pain.
Learn to let go,
Just listen to the rain.

Can you hear it?
Drops of water washing away.
Wiping away the chalk,
A new start today.

Watch me fly,
Watch me soar.
I've got something
You can't ignore.

Everyone I care about
Is smiling back at me.
I know without a doubt,
There's nowhere else I'd rather be.

JUST A GIRL ON A STRINGS

Maria Kubiak

You know that I love you,
You know that I would do anything for you,
But for you,
I am just a girl on a strings.

Please let me go,
Let me live my life,
Let me be free,
But i am just a girl on a strings.

Fake happiness on my face,
Real pain in my heart,
I don't want be just a girl on a string.

PERVADE

David McKinstry

Permeating through me
Every fragment of my soul
Reverberating endlessly in my heart
Vanquishing the darkness inside
Answering all my questions
Dredging my spirit of all its sorrow
Enduring, my love for you pervades

UNVEILED RELIEF

Loftydreams101 of <http://loftydreams101.deviantart.com>

She is the water
That so carefully evades my haunted form
As torrents of anguish, that are sent left and right
Birthing a hate spawn, of searing frustration
A ghoulish reverie
Taken from me, in each troubled place I occur

How she reels me in
Unraveling my hide
Each boastful claim dissipating
Slowly perishing, one after the next

Each seedy verse flees!
As I purge my hefty and tainted conscience
More and more, until i flounder scrawny and wretched
Sinfully fuming, so hideously exposed

"Take them from me,
Oh maiden of revelation
Your harsh unveiling, is my true moment of glory
How I shine through your masterful cruelty
Beckoning, as my pride rots and shrivels
Lingering for just a little more"

TIME

Solilska

There's a fate which I'm on my way, a grave with my name,
A dog to tame, memories to frame, a date assigned to my name.
A woman to kiss, all my friends to miss,
Random people I will hate, a family to reciprocate,
My own mind to dominate, my Intellect to elevate,
All this life will be mine,
All I want is for you to share my time.