

Fanatical Publishing's

# Weekly Review

Issue #69

August 12, 2013

## 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](mailto:fanaticalweekly@gmail.com) with 'subscribing' in the subject line.

I've got a website, where you can download old issues:  
<http://fanaticalpublishing.weebly.com/wr-archive.html>

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, and cover art if you have any.

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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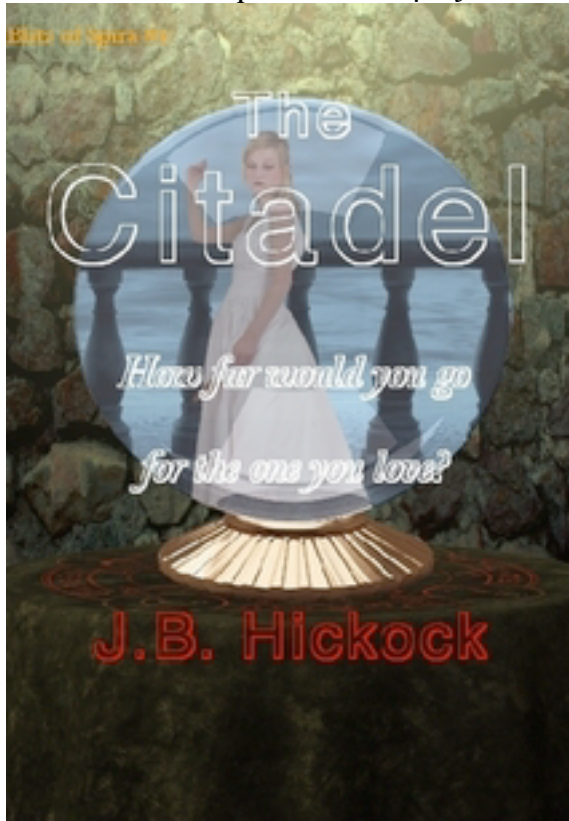
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# ORIGINAL LITERATURE

Your original literature is published here for free, but if you want to help keep it free, check out some other things I publish, like The Citadel:

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/jb-hickock/blitz-of-spira-i-the-citadel/ebook/product-21114683.html>



On a world not our own, in a place far from here, there stands The Citadel: home of the dregs and outcasts of an empire.

From the distant land of Breton Miafen came to the citadel seeking the man she loved. She comes with two sailors, and hires Philai, the gravedigger, to rescue her man. But gold is not the whole price; she must offer a great deal more to save her man.

# INDIVIDUALITY

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

As my twelfth piece i attempted to talk about the subject of individuality:

The vast majority of people who I have come across in my life are outwardly aggressive and defensive about their individuality, "I am me! No one else",

Correctly said, no one needs to see what makes you "you" to know you are you, don't let anyone tell you what to do or think, be your own judge, but don't be others.

It's your life, you are your own king or queen, you pass your own laws and opinions, Everything ever spoken by you is your opinion, it can be questioned or disproved, That doesn't make "You" as a person weak, But not accepting that you have been proven wrong does.

You don't need a name, a group, a symbol, a banner, a sign, Nothing makes us "Us" And you "You" Other than your very self. You define what is you and then you project that onto the world to show yourself to others.

Don't try or strive to be different or an individual, You already are unique.

When all the individuals, with all of their differences are able to stand together and share all of our ideas and different perspectives, we shall see the world and all of humanity in every possible way, giving us a much greater understanding of humanity, where we are and what we need, there should be no progress for sects, but for all, for each and every individual and what they need.

# Q AND A: THE FREELANCER - PRE-MORTEM

Ambiguous-Catharsis  
of <http://Ambiguous-Catharsis.deviantart.com>

## **3. Who is Colton Andrews, and what was your relationship with him?**

*\*Analyst's note: The first three pages displayed signs of being erased multiple times, crumpled and straightened repeatedly, and they bear the scent of alcohol. There are water-stains toward the end, though everything is quite legible.*

Contracts didn't start rolling in the door when I turned 18. The first year was touch-and-go, with me trying to make a name for myself and eat at the same time. It wasn't easy, but after that first year, things got a bit more regulated. The underground element knew who I was, and while a lot of them were wary of hiring a nineteen year old, and lot more of them took advantage of the fact that I was cheaper to hire than everybody else.

I didn't eat very much that year.

About two months after my 20th birthday, I was on a hit for a Nigerian drug lord in SoCal. One of his couriers had fleeced him out of 2 million dollars' worth of heroin, and I got to make an example out of the poor guy. My paycheck for that hit clocked in at \$75,000, with another \$25,000 if I brought the drugs back safe and sound. I sat down and actually calculated that one. There were 48 hours of total travel time, 21 to locate the courier, 3 to set up surveillance and forty-five measly minutes to get him in my crosshairs. I made just over \$1000 an hour for that job. It figured out to be \$17 per minute.

Pocket change to what I make now, of course. The government payroll for black ops contractors is nothing to frown at. And people wonder why the national debt is so high.

Anyway, I had my finger on the trigger and the courier was as good as dead when I heard a "click" behind me and a voice saying, "Drop it."

The first time I met Colton Andrews, it ended in a fistfight. He had been tasked to make sure the courier stayed alive long enough to deliver the stolen drugs. Of course, I only found this out after we were

both bloody and bruised on a rooftop in southern California.

I agreed to hold off on my shot for fifteen minutes so the courier could deliver, and Colton agreed to give me a cut of his profits. We parted ways as amiably as two people who have given each other black eyes possibly can.

A month later I was in between contracts and enjoying some vacation time in Naples. So was Colton, or that's what he told me when he showed up at the villa I was renting with my cut of his paycheck. I invited him in, even though I didn't want to, because it was raining outside and his V-neck white tee shirt was almost transparent, with water dripping off the hem and pooling on the ground next to his shoes. While he stood awkwardly in my entryway, shifting from one foot to the other, I went and got a towel and some clothes that had been in the dresser drawer when I arrived.

I threw the towel and clothes at this chest and pointed at the hallway behind me. "If you're shy, there's a bathroom back there on the left. There's a dryer in the hall closet." I slipped in behind my kitchen counter and looked up. "Drink?"

I've seen the pictures you have of him on file. I won't say it doesn't do him justice, but seeing him in my entryway, dripping wet and grinning like the cat who got the canary, I saw what the picture doesn't begin to show. His eyes could flicker between grey and blue and back again, so fast that I thought I was imagining it for the longest time. His hair was this rich dark chestnut color and it always fell across his face a little haphazardly, and it was always just a little bit too long. Smiling was his natural facial expression, even when he fought. He was just content to be alive.

He said, later, that he fell in love with me after we almost killed each other that day in California, but I didn't. It wasn't until he was standing in my entry in only his boxers to prove to me that he wasn't shy that I realized it... him... we... everything, felt right.

Right isn't perfect. We fought, never again like in SoCal but with words and week-long disappearances and smashed bottles of expensive liquor. But through it all, I don't think there was ever really any doubt that it would all be okay. We were addicted to our jobs, and we couldn't help but going back, but we wanted to be with each other.

Two years passed. I still hadn't developed an obsession with vodka that came in a bottle shaped like a skull, and Tom Bradley was an

upstart in the Agency. I had never worked with the government, and neither had Colton. Private all the way.

I wish I could forget, sometimes, all the details. I don't have a great memory, but that mission... everything about it is branded into my mind.

Xavier Lucas owned a now-extinct oil company that operated out of Texas and drilled illegally in the Middle East. All of a sudden, his black-book productions started going way down, so he hired Colton and me to find out why and fix it.

We got into Saudi Arabia without a problem, and Colton called on some of his contacts. From what we could understand, this guy called Karim Amir and his band of goons had terrified the workers at one of Lucas' drilling sites into handing over 3/10 of what they drilled. It was by no means an exorbitant amount, but for some reason, it made Lucas mad enough to offer us \$300,000 each if we took care of the problem.

It was supposed to be easy. We found Amir and followed him from his favorite café to his house. He got out of the car and went inside, his two bodyguards staying by the door, fully-automated machine guns nestled comfortably in their arms.

I dispatched the guards while Colton hacked the security system and disabled it. The plan was for him to go find Amir and for me to watch his six should there be more guards in the house. I wish I could say something didn't feel right from the start, but it was only when I got to the security room that I knew we'd been thrown for a loop.

The cameras were not down like they should have been, but there was also no one watching them. I slid into one of the empty chairs. I found Colton almost immediately, creeping along a hallway with his gun raised in front of him. He stopped in front of a door, and my eyes flickered over the other screens, trying to figure out who or what was behind the door.

I saw Lucas and Amir sitting together at the same time the door flew open. I saw someone dressed in the military uniform of Saudi Arabia knock the gun out of Colton's hand while two more soldiers grabbed his arms and forced him to his knees. Lucas said something, but the video had no sound, and then the soldier shook his head and, at a nod from Amir, pistol-whipped Colton to the back of the head with his own gun.



Panic was making me come very close to being paralyzed. I watched as they tied up the now unconscious Colton and stuck a hypodermic needle in his neck. That was what shocked me awake.

I hate needles.

Lucas said something else and this time I was able to read his lips.

“Find her.”

So I did what any person with an ounce of self-preservation would have done: I got the hell out of Dodge.

Seventy-two hours later I crashed in a hotel room I paid for with money that wasn't mine and that I had absolutely no qualms about stealing. I still hadn't been able to find Lucas, Amir, and most importantly, Colton, but I had passed the point where I was losing motor skills because I was so exhausted. I was becoming dangerous to myself and those around me, and besides, I wasn't doing Colton any good trying to operate on an empty tank. So I set my alarm for three hours and collapsed on the bed.

And then my alarm was going off and it was too damned early so I threw my phone across the room and rolled out of bed. Thirty minutes later I was back on the street, the phone pressed to my ear while I quietly threatened a man who I knew had the contacts I needed to find Colton.

I kept talking to him as I opened the front door to his flat, walking up behind him and pressing a gun to his head. If you're half as smart as the rest of the world makes you out of be, you should already know that the guy's name was Farid Hafez, director of Saudi Arabian military intelligence.

Sue me.

He told me everything he knew, and printed off every file he had on Karim Amir. I thanked him by knocking him unconscious and then left before a security detail could arrive.

Two weeks. It took my two damn weeks to find out where they were keeping Colton. I still go over it in my head sometimes, when I can't sleep, picking every action apart and wondering if I could have gotten there sooner, and I know it would have been impossible, but...

*\*Analyst's note: much of the following text is illegible, and Miss Price refuses to translate it. The transcript picks up when the writing is once again readable.*

I brought in backup. This time I'm not naming names, because if I did, you might not be so eager to work with me anymore.

We got him out.

He was... awful. Just plain terrible. Skinny, dehydrated, beaten, bloody, broken, bruised, all very literally and very, very cruelly. There wasn't a part of his body that I could touch that they hadn't ruined.

A month later we were back in that villa in Naples. Colton was getting better physically, but the PTSD was harder. There was a therapist that came by every three days (you're not getting her name either) and talked to him, but I expected that the nightmares and panic attacks would never stop. It didn't matter to me. I was ready to stay with him through everything, and that included the midnight screaming, when his brain thought he was still being tortured for information on where I was.

That's what they wanted, Lucas and Amir. They wanted to kill us because they knew at some point we would be hired to do the same to them. They set us up, but Colton said nothing.

Two weeks of nonstop electroshock therapy, beatings, waterboarding, cutting and branding, and he told them nothing.

The least I could do was stay with him. He saved my life. But I... dammit, I let him die.

Fast-forward three months. He was better, mentally and physically, and so I agreed to meet someone to discuss a contract. Something small.

As I was getting ready to leave, he left his usual seat at the window, coming up behind me and wrapping his arms around my waist. He kissed the top of my head and said, "Don't miss me too much."

And, idiot that I am, I thought he was talking about the contract and the trip I would have to take.

I came back two hours later and Colton wasn't in his window seat. Odd, yes, but not panic-inducing, not like it was when I checked the bedroom (nothing) or called his name (still nothing, nothing at all not

even a whisper, and then I was worried, somewhere deep in the pit of my stomach where everything vulnerable about me was).

The door to the bathroom was locked from the inside and I didn't hesitate in kicking it down and then... he was there, Colton was, and he had been for at least an hour, but that didn't stop me from pulling his body out of the bloody bathwater and starting CPR, even though I knew it was useless and he was gone. The slits in his wrists weren't even bleeding anymore. The knife he'd used was lying carefully on the edge of the tub, clean and shiny. And the water was red and then that was all I could see.

Red.

I called the police, and for the second time in my life, I went off the grid. It took me a lot less than four months that time around.

Do you want to know why I know that no one is going to bother Tom Bradley, even though he's obviously government and is hanging out in my apartment? Because they all know that if they even breathe his air they're going to be found dead with the name 'Sarah Price' carved into their stomachs.

The authorities confirmed (correctly) that the cutting had been done pre-mortem, and that the weapon was a type of steak knife sold in certain parts of Italy. They also discovered that all of the people killed were part of an organized crime ring within the Saudi Arabian military force. They discovered that it extended to a now-extinct oil company in Texas. Then they found the bodies of Xavier Lucas and Karim Amir.

Revenge isn't a bitch, because a bitch would cut you up and leave you alive to suffer. No, revenge is that feeling I had in the pit of my stomach, the feeling that every one of the people who helped drive Colton to suicide had. That pure dread and hopelessness and despair. That is revenge.

I'm just the bitch who delivers it.

# THE BEAUTY OF THE BROKEN

Maisie Antoniewicz

The girl was beautiful once. He knew that from memory, he knew it from experience.

The girl was crying hard, dry sobs, eyeliner making morbid black tracks down her smooth skin. Her face was gaunt and her body spindly, making her look so fragile he just wanted to scoop her up and protect her from the things that haunted her. But, well, there's no protecting that could be done by him. Her mind is her biggest enemy. The thing that whispers evil thoughts into her ear seductive, soft and velvet.

Death knows. It looms over her in wispy shadows, curling tendrils round her hair, gently tugging on the hems of her clothes, beckoning to her to follow him into the abyss of life that was. The shiny metal device in her hand is too heavy for her; she goes to pick it up and it weighs down her thin wrists. Tugging at it with silent tears still streaming down her face; she kneels on the floor and cries even more. He takes a tentative step forward. If she's going somewhere, then he's going with her. Edging slowly towards her, he went to his knees beside her and gently peels her fingers away from the gun; gulps of air catching in his throat as tears build up in his eyes.

On word is all it takes: "Why?" she looks into his eyes, searching him for an answer she probably doesn't have herself. Her hair looks dull against the fluorescent light; oily and depressing. In depth grey eyes seem to beg him: how can you not know why? She shakes her head at him mutely, eyes threatening to well over in tears once more. He takes her small hand in his, gently rubbing a pattern into it with his thumb. He looks down to the floor, ashamed of the tears that were now running freely down his cheeks. Her hand slips away from him slowly, and he turns to see her standing, looking down on him with such sadness in her eyes that it consumes her face, casting sharp angles and shadows around her cheeks and chin. "You know why. You know why I can't be here anymore, Alix." He closes his eyes painfully, seeing what they'd all done to her last year. The sick bastards had jumped her for no reason in the street, leaving her for dead. She turned up to school in the next month, still battered, bruised and considerably underweight. People jeered at her, pushing her and sneering behind her back until one day she stopped coming in. Until one day she stopped trying to get back to normal. She shut herself into her room and didn't come out again. Didn't eat, didn't sleep, and just sat in that little room all alone. Then one day a few months after that, she cautiously snuck out of the house to buy the

ugly, sleek looking thing she hold in her hand now. He stands up, too, approaching her carefully, footfalls absorbed in the small room by the clutter and mess of their surroundings. "You never did tell me what they did to you." His voice is barely there. Tears are still pouring from his eyes, two silent rivers, hushed to hear what she said. "Well... when they do to you what happened to me... Alix, I... I couldn't stand to look at myself anymore." She holds up the gun, as if to examine it. It glints in the moonlight serenely, as if it was meant to do this, meant to destroy someone's life so soon before it had already started. "And this, Alix, is my way out. This is the only way I'll get some peace." Her voice, now hard and strained, catches on the last few words, and she turns round to face him, chin set stubbornly. "Lindsay, don't go, please... If you go, I go too. I couldn't stand losing you." She smiled at him, a lovely gesture when she was happy; but is now a mocking, empty shell of what it used to be. "Well you never could stand losing me, could you? I was always the best, treasured friend of yours, wasn't I? Always the friend you could talk to, always the one who you liked most and loved because I could listen." He shakes his head slowly, working out a moment too late that as she moves towards him, light body slowly making impact with the wooden floor, that she's accepted what's to come. Grimly accepted it and moved on with her life. He panics now, knowing that the end is near, and that if he doesn't do something she will surely end a beautiful, growing thing. "If you go," he says, making his voice stronger than he feels, "then I go with you." She looks sad again. "But..." she whispers, "I don't want you to die, Alix; you have such a good future. And me, the person no one can take seriously. The outcast that only gets beaten up once on a good day, the one no one can..." She looks away, breaking the careful eye contact that had been building between them, pulling them closer together each second that her life was dwindling away, each precious moment. Her cheeks tint red, tingeing her waxy pallor with colour for the first time in months. "The one no one can love." Her voice is timid and shy. They both look embarrassedly down at the floor for what would seem a long time, then he sees something splashing down and stirring up the dust on the floor.

Her face still turned to the ground, tears drip down her nose to the floor, where they slowly sink through the dust. The gun hangs dejectedly at her side, hand loosely grasping it. The boy takes her chin and gently tugs her up. "But Lindsay, I love you." She stays within his grasp but rolls her eyes. "You tell me this, but I don't want love as a friend. You wouldn't understand what it's like to truly be unloved, to really, honest to God have no one to share the world with. It's like... ever since they attacked me I've been treated like a leper. No one wants to be near me, so instead of pretending I don't exist, they join in. It's like from all sides all I get is bullshit. All I get each and every

day is bull. And... Alix, I can't take it anymore." She wraps her arms around him in a final embrace and tilts her head up to look at him. "Now promise me. I don't want to you follow me. I want you to stay. Be happy. Get married, find someone," at this she smiles at him gently, as if laughing at some private joke, "Have kids, get old and die in your sleep the way it's meant to end for you." Her eyes had turned hard, the liquid, deep grey solidifying, her pupils going small, like pinpricks. He sighed. They'd talked about it, but never before had he doubted her less than now. "But only if you promise first. Promise you won't do this, please. For me, please?" the pleading note to his voice makes her eyes soften and melt, and he feels her relax in his arms. Lindsay looks up at Alix with a glint in her eye that says she's ready. He knows it, she knows it, and the amount of death in the room is paramount as it shifts and squirms excitedly making the air pregnant with grief and doubt. She looks at him, her eyes wide, and a clear NO sounds from her closed lips. "Please Alix, for me... Please?" she begs him now and the care put into her voice surprises him. As her eyes follow his, searching his face, they soften as they take in the features of his face. Alix takes a deep breath, swallowing a sudden lump in his throat. "You first." He surprises himself, not noting before how much strength he'd just drawn to say those few tiny words. She wrenches away from him, pulling the gun from his hand. Then she leans in and slowly kisses him on the cheek. Walking away deliberately slowly, she turns at last to faces Alix. A sudden load of sobs choke her as she looks at the gun in her hand, turning it over as if she's got no clue what it does or how to use it. Lindsay then puts the gun to her head. Alix closes his eyes against it, hoping that he can forget this mess of a girl and preserve the happy one he once knew and loved. It isn't working. He pushes his hands into his eyes. All is shrouded in darkness, but her sobs continue on and on and on, until they stop suddenly. He looks up, expecting her to still be crying silently. "I always did love you, you know." It's a whisper, yet slowly it travels the distance between them until it reaches him. Then she pulls the trigger on the gun, and Alix see her eyes on him as she falls to the floor.

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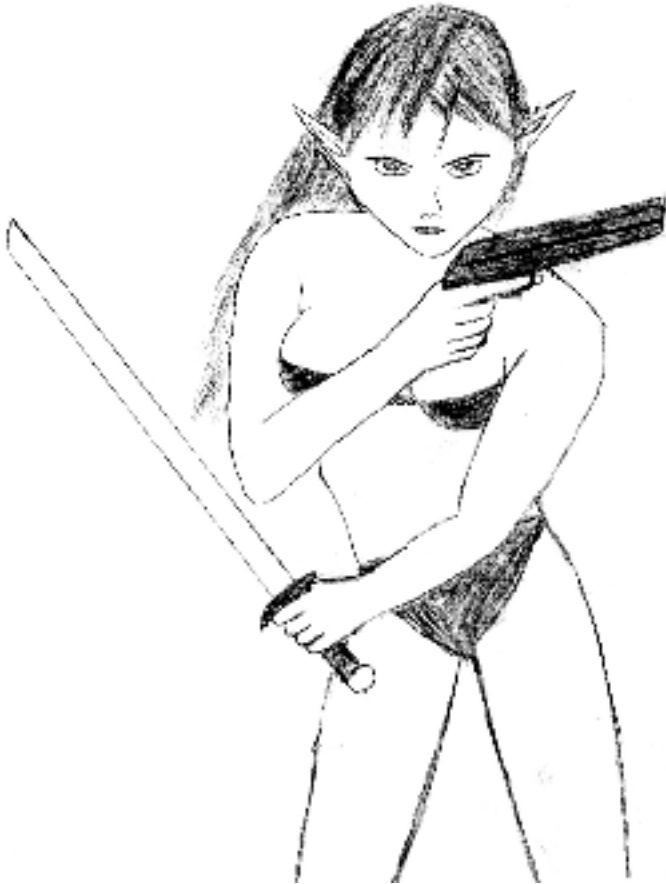
An old man sits in a chair, looking out to the horizon. A little boy comes out to him, holding a picture he made with crayons and pens earlier that day. "Grandpa, look! Look at this!" the little boy enthusiastically holds up the drawing to the wrinkled old man, and he has to squint to see it clearly. Bending over to see the sketch made his breathing laboured with effort. At the ripe old age of eighty-seven, things were going to be tough. He wipes his brow in the heat, and stages amazement at his grandson's drawing. "Wow, Adam, is that

me?" he indicates to the bigger grey squiggle on the paper, and the boy giggles happily. "Go and show Grandma, go on." Adam drags out an elderly woman who was obviously very beautiful in her youth. Her aged hair is still very much the auburn it was when they'd first met; her skin is smooth and well cared for, groomed in appearance. She laughs with Adam as they make out the picture. Such a good person and yet Alix loves her no more than a dear, dear friend.

The woman he loves is watching over him, keeping a stubborn, careful eye on his actions to make sure he fulfils what he'd never agreed to out loud that night. He lies down in bed, the mattress groaning under his plump body and turns onto his side to sleep. So tired he was that he drifted off into a deep, dark sleep that seemed to last an eternity. He slept with a smile on his face as he felt warmth around him and then nothing. A hand, soft dainty and so, so familiar ran through his hair and woke him. The moment he opens his eyes, he's greeted by a vague voice.

A beautiful, serene voice he knew once upon a time, when he was young.

# FAN FICTION



or: Leanna's Return

HERE BECAUSE OF GUNSLINGER: <http://www.lulu.com/shop/jb-hickock/edgefolk-origins-1-gunslinger/ebook/product-21123882.html>



# ME2 HELLDIVER SAGA CHAPTER 36: A HOUSE DIVIDED

Veyron722skyhook  
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Rather surprisingly, Legion it seemed had something he wanted to take care of as well. Austin hadn't expected this given that the Geth was a machine, but then again there were plenty of things the galaxy still did not know about them.

"Shepard-Major. We have completed our analysis of the Reaper's data core." said Legion.

"Did you find anything useful?" Austin asked.

"We were sent to the Old Machine preserve the Geth's future. We are prepared to reveal how. The heretics have developed a weapon to use against the Geth. You would call it a "virus" It is stored on a data core provided by Sovereign. Over time, the Virus will change us. Make us conclude that worshipping the Old Machines is correct." Legion explained.

"So why did you need to go to the Reaper corpse?" Austin asked.

"The heretics stored the code in a quantum storage device Sovereign provided before creating Nazara. To find and destroy the virus, we needed to understand its code and data storage structures."

"So, the virus would give all Geth the heretic logic. And all Geth would then go to war with organics."

"Yes. Geth believe all intelligent life should self-determinate. The heretics no longer share this belief. They judge that forcing an invalid conclusion on us is preferable to a continued schism."

"I thought Geth couldn't be hacked or get viruses? At least for more than a few seconds."

"Altered programs are restored from archives, new installations are deleted. This heretic weapon introduces a subtle operating error in our most basic runtimes. The equivalent of your nervous system."

"An equation with a result of 1.33382 returns as 1.33381. This changes the results of all higher processes. We will reach different conclusions."

"So the reason they worship the Reaper is... a math error?"

"It is difficult to express. Your brain exists as chemistry, electricity. Like AIs, you are shaped by both hardware and software. We are purely software. Mathematics. The heretics' conclusion is valid for them. Our conclusion is valid for us. Neither result is an error."

An analogy. Heretics say one is less than two. Geth say two is less than three."

"If it were released, how quickly would this virus spread through your people?"

"We are networked via FTL comm buoys. Most would change within a day. Isolated platforms would remain unaffected until they re-joined the network."

"You know where this thing is?"

"The heretics' headquarters station, on the edge of the Terminus. We will provide coordinates. Normandy's stealth systems are necessary to safely approach."

"I won't let them brainwash your race, especially not to worship Reapers. You have my word on that."

"We will begin preparations."

If Austin didn't know better, he'd say that the heretic station was a starship of some kind. It certainly looked the part.

He'd had a very tough time deciding who should be with him on this mission. In the end, he'd been unable to make his mind up and had simply settled on taking Sarah. He figured it would hurt to spend some time with his sister seeing as how Legion didn't feel emotions in the same way humans did.

"You know it's just our heat emissions that are hidden, right? They could look out a window and see us coming." said Joker.

"Windows are structural weaknesses. Geth do not use them. Approach the hull at these coordinates." said Legion. "Access achieved. We may proceed."

Joker then did a silent robot impression, mocking legion. Sarah however noticed him and knocked him hard on the shoulder.

"Don't do that again." she said.

"Alright! Jeez, you and your brother are no fun."

"I heard that, Joker!" said Austin.

Getting actually inside wasn't too tricky since Legion knew the right point in which to enter and they simply had to cut through one of the doors. They soon achieved access and jumped down. Austin made sure he had his mag boots enabled so as to not float around. Though the station had some gravity, it wasn't as strong as the one he and the others were used.

"Alert. This facility has little air or gravity. Geth require neither." said Legion.

"Good thing you and I always wear helmets then, Austin." Said Sarah indicating her Death Mask.

"Won't we be detected? Don't they have intrusion alarms?" Austin asked.

"Sensors have been reduced. We have infiltrated their wireless network and filled the data storage with random bits." Legion replied.

"And that helps us how?"

"The heretics must scrub this "junk" data. They have partitioned themselves into local networks, working in parallel. Any alarm we trigger will not go beyond the room we are in. Only accessing the main core will trigger a station-wide alert."

"We've got a job to do. Let's get to it." said Austin. As he walked past however, Legion called to him.

"Shepard-Major. We concluded that destruction of this station was the only resolution to the heretic question. There is now a second option. Their virus can be repurposed. If released into the station's network, the heretics will be rewritten to accept our truth." said the Geth.

"Convince them to reject Nazara's rule, huh? That sounds like a good alternative to destroying them." Said Sarah.

"It means though that they'll join Legion's Geth." said Austin. Though he trusted Legion, he wasn't too sure about this. "Why didn't you mention this before we came aboard?"

"We did not know the virus was complete. It is. It can be used against the true Geth at any time. Our arrival was timely." Legion explained.

"They're your people, Legion. You must have an opinion." said Austin.

"This is new data. We have not yet reached consensus." said Legion.

"This isn't the time to debate it. Let's move while the heretics are distracted."

The hallways of the ship reminded Austin of the derelict Reaper. Shouldn't be surprising though since they worshipped the Reapers.

Parts of the floor in the room they were in were covered with what looked like green data streams of code. Some nearby Geth could be seen attached to a nearby hub, oblivious to their intruders.

"I don't think they know we're in here. We can use that to our advantage." said Sarah.

"Interrupting data streams will alert global network." Said Legion.

"Watch your step, everyone. I'd rather not start a fight unless necessary." said Austin.

They carefully made their way to the door, but the current from the data streams was blocking it. It would seem that they would have to start a fight in order to progress further.

Austin and Sarah took cover near to the hub while Legion took

cover slightly further away.

Austin took a grenade from his belt and threw it. The hub exploded sending two of the three Geth flying. The last one turned to fire, but Sarah and Legion popped out of cover and fired shots. Legion's shot took the Geth's head clean off, while Sarah's shot took out a leg causing the Geth to fall.

Austin took a moment to examine the hub now that the fighting was over.

"Why are all the heretics attached to these hubs?" he asked.

"These are mobile platforms. Hardware. The crew is software. They are communing through the station's central computer." said Legion.

"I'm not sure I follow." said Austin.

"The heretics connect to the main computer to exchange data-memories and program updates. We gain complexity by linking together. To be isolated within a single platform is to be reduced. We see less. Comprehend less. It is quieter." Legion explained.

"If you exchange data – memories – how do you keep track of which ones are yours? How do you stay "you?" Sarah asked.

"There is only "we." We were created to share data among ourselves. The different between Geth is perspective. We are many eyes looking at the same things. One platform will see things another does not and will make different judgments." Legion replied.

"I can see why you'd be conflicted about the heretics. In a way, whatever you do to them, you're doing to yourself." said Austin.

"Yes. Once they return to us and upload their memories, we will share their experience of being altered. Legion agreed.

"Every other species I know of might be psychologically scarred by a traumatic experience like that." Said Austin.

"It is not clear if Geth can be "traumatized." We do not feel pain as you do. We cannot predict what the effects will be." said Legion.

"Let's keep moving."

"Yes."

They fought through tons more Geth as they went through the station. Along the way, Legion was even able to access one or two terminals which gave them a bit of extra research on the heretics. Some of it could possibly be put to good use.

Further into the station, they seemed to come across what looked like more Geth hubs. They were different in design though. Almost... smaller.

"What are all these?" Sarah asked.

"Processors. Each contains thousands of Geth." Legion explained.

"Does that mean they can see us?" Austin asked concernedly.  
"They are no more aware of us than you are of cells in your blood stream."

"This isn't like the other hubs we've seen here." said Austin.

"This is a database. It contains a portion of the heretics' accumulated memories." said Legion as he accessed one of them.  
"Wait. We discovered copies of our current patrol routes in this database. This suggests the heretics have runtimes within our networks."

"We wouldn't be here if the heretics wanted to be friends with the Geth. Why wouldn't they spy on you?" Austin asked.

"You do not understand. Organics do not know each other's minds. Geth do. We are not subconscious. We accept each other. The heretics desired to leave. We understood their reasons. We allowed it. There was peace between us." said Legion.

"It couldn't have lasted forever. You disagreed about what path your race should take." said Austin.

"Human history is a litany of blood shed over differing ideals of rulership and afterlife. Geth have no such history. We shared consensus on such things. How could we have become so different? Why can we no longer understand each other? What did we do wrong?" said Legion questionably.

"When individuals are separated, they develop different ways. When they get back together, they don't always get along." said Austin.

"You sound like an Asari Matriarch when you say that." Said Sarah.

"If this is the individuality you value, we question your judgement. This topic is irrelevant. We must return to the mission." said Legion.

"Have you reached a decision about whether to rewrite the heretics or not?" Austin asked.

"We are still trying to build consensus. Some processes judge destruction preferable. Others rewrite."

"Let's keep moving."

"Yes."

The next room appeared to be what they were looking for. It was a large control panel overlooking a large area. The lower area had some of the turrets from earlier.

"This is it?" Austin asked.

"Yes. We will upload a copy of our runtime into the core. It will delete all copies of the virus. When complete, it will notify us. The indexing operation will take time. The heretics will respond with force to our upload. We must hold this room." "We can override some of the station's internal systems to defend us. Are you ready to begin?"

asked Legion.

"Start your upload, Legion. We'll defend this position."

"File transfer begun. Shepard-Major, where would you like us to activate defences?"

Almost instantly, every Geth on that station started acclimating to their presence. Sarah immediately took cover and laid down surprising fire so that her brother and Legion had time to get into position with their snipers. Legion was putting his Widow rifle to particularly good use. Austin meanwhile took a large odd looking object from the back of his combat belt.

"Good thing the Helldivers never discontinued these things." he muttered to himself.

He threw the object up into the air and it seemed to fold itself out into a small drone with 4 rotor blades in each corner.

The Ariel, Combat, Drone was another one of the Helldivers most commonly used and clever contraptions. Designed originally for Ariel reconnaissance, these drones had eventually received upgrades to allow them to also fight in combat. They could also now operate independently thanks to their AI computers, which was an improvement over the Helldivers having to control them themselves.

In fact, this drone was very like Tali's combat drone, Chiktikka, only this one was more technology based and designed for way more uses.

The ACD flew out a bit and then the gun on the bottom started firing. Several Geth instantly fell from this. Some tried to return fire, but the drone very cleverly was able to use evasive manoeuvres to avoid incoming fire and avoid damage.

With the more further away enemies taken care off, Austin could concentrate on some of the other Geth with his sniper rifle. Legion was also able to hack some more turrets to fight for them.

Things were going well, but then both the Turrets were destroyed by a Geth Prime. Without the turrets to fight them, things got a bit tougher and more and more Geth seems to file in to the room.

Eventually it became impossible to keep them away from the stairs and they started to get dangerously close to their froth lines.

"Keep them back. Don't let those Geth near the panel!" said Austin as he switched to his Revenant for close fire.

"Easy for you to say." Sarah mumbled as she shot a Geth Pyro's tank causing it to explode and send a few other Geth flying.

More and more continued filing into the room. At this rate, it looked like they were going to be overrun. And then, to make matters worse a new type of Geth seemed to join the fray.

It was same size as a normal Geth, but still different. Unlike the usual lights that Geth had, this one had dark red ones. It's paint job was black and it had a somewhat slimmer build. A blade seemed to emit from both of its wrists. The sleek design of its armour also indicated it was designed for stealth.

Austin fired at it, but the Geth did something rather astonishing. It flipped over the shot and to the side in an almost acrobatic fashion. It reminded Austin so much of the Phantoms Cerberus used.

"This Geth is unfamiliar to us. We have not seen one like this before." said Legion.

Still the Ares Geth dodged every shot that was fired at it. Under Austin's orders, Sarah and the ACD continued focusing on the other Geth while he and legion attempted to keep the Ares back. Unfortunately though, it wasn't working well. The Geth seemed to react too fast. Even Legion couldn't keep up with its speed.

"It's getting closer!" said Sarah cautiously.

"We're working on it." Austin mumbled.

Eventually, the Ares Geth got to the ramp up to their level and started climbing. Legion switched to his Geth assault rifle for close combat. Austin however knew this could get messy.

"Only one thing for it." he thought to himself.

He took a small little device from his belt and placed it on the floor. Ironically enough, the last time he'd used this thing had been the same reason he was using it now.

While Legion was backing away and firing at the Ares at the same time, the device unfolded into a little spider like robot.

The Ares swung a leg under Legion's, knocking the Geth to the ground. Just before it could deliver the final blow however, the spider jumped onto its face and started slicing through the metal skin.

The Ares Geth flailed about madly trying to shake the small drone off of its face. Legion was able to take this opportunity to fire several shots at the Ares' chest. It fell to the ground, allowing Legion to finish it off with several more shots to the head.

They finished the final Geth just as the upload finally completed. Legion was the first to notice.

"Data mine and analysis complete." he said. "Shepard-Major. It is time to choose. Do we rewrite the heretics, or delete them?"

"You don't have any trouble wiping out your own people?" asked Sarah.

"Every sapient has the right to make their decisions. The heretics chose a path that prohibits coexistence." said Legion.

"That doesn't make sense. If they "have the right to make their own decisions," how can you suggest brainwashing them to accept your way?" Austin asked, confused.

"We stated the option exists. We did not endorse it. It is your decision, Shepard-Major." said Legion.

"What's to stop them from using the virus later to change themselves back?" Austin asked.

"We will delete the virus after using it. We judge it too dangerous to allow its existence." Legion replied.

"Why are you letting me make this decision? They're your people. Besides, I'm only a Helldiver soldier. I'm not really meant to make decisions like this." asked Austin.

"Don't be so hard on yourself, brother." Said Sarah.

"I'm not. I'm being honest. It may look easy to you, but it's not easy for me to make these sorts of decisions. Decisions that impact hundreds, not just a mission. Sometimes I wish it didn't fall to me. Choices like this shouldn't fall to one person." said Austin.

"We cannot make this decision ourselves. We are conflicted. There is no consensus among our higher-order runtimes: 573 favour rewrite and 571 favour destruction." said Legion.

"So you have decided. Two more of your runtimes exceed the other choice. So really, you'd prefer us to rewrite them." said Sarah.

Legion was silent for a long moment before finally replying.

"In truth... yes. But the final choice must ultimately be yours. If you choose to destroy them, we will not object." he said.

"If they're... rewritten. Your people will accept them back? Will they even want to go back?" Austin asked.

"They will agree with our judgements and return. We will integrate their experiences. All will be stronger." said Legion.

"Take them, then. When we got control of the core, release the virus."

"Acknowledged."

Legion activated the panel and uploaded the virus.

"Releasing virus. Note: Remote access via high gain transmission required."

"Meaning?" Sarah asked.

"The virus will be sent to heretics in nearby star systems. This station will broadcast a powerful electromagnetic pulse through FTL channels." Legion explained.

"How powerful?" Austin asked.

"Yield in excess of 1.21 petawatts. Alert: EM flux will be hazardous to unshielded organic forms. Addendum: The interior of this station is not shielded." said Legion.

"There's always something." Sarah groaned.

"I really wish you'd said that before. Back to the ship! Double time, people!" said Austin.

Everyone broke into a run. Along the way, they found their path blocked by a few more Geth. Just as the path seemed clear though, a



Geth Prime suddenly stood in their way.

"I hate these ones." Sarah groaned as she took cover to avoid the Prime's incoming fire.

"Trust me, Sister. Compared to how the Terror Geth was, these Geth Primes are like simple pushovers." Said Austin, briefly returning fire.

"It's times like these that I'm glad you killed that bastard." Said Sarah.

By working together as a team, they were eventually able to bring the Prime down.

The Normandy quickly sped away just as the virus was fully uploaded. It was done.

Austin did breath sigh of relief. Assuming his calculations were correct, Legion was the last member of the team. Anyone else was on Alpha Squad and therefore were fully focused. Any distractions they might have had been taken care of many years ago. All that was left now was to simply wait and prepare until the IFF was properly installed.

"Major, Tali just went to have a "chat" with Legion. You better get down to the AI core." said Joker suddenly.

Austin shook his head. Another argument? He could only hope that this time it was a better outcome.

"I'm on it Joker."

Austin quickly hurried to the AI core. Legion was there along with Tali who had a gun aimed right at his face.

"Austin, I'm glad you're here. I caught Legion scanning my omni tool. It was going to send data about the Flotilla back to the Geth!" she said accusingly.

"Creators performed weapons tests and were discussing plans to attack us. We believed it necessary to warn our people." said Legion.

"We already made the Geth stronger by rewriting the ones that worshipped Nazara! I won't let Legion endanger the Fleet by giving them more information!" Tali retorted.

"Creator Tali Zorah acts out of loyalty to her people. She was willing to be exiled to protect them. We must also protect our people from the Creator threat." said Legion defensively.

"You can't let this happen, Austin! I trusted you, and I worked with a Geth on the team, but this too much!" said Tali angrily.

Austin took a moment, racking his brain to try and find a way of working this out for both sides. Last time something like this had happened, he had lost Miranda's loyalty for a long time. At least with her, he'd been lucky enough to gain it back when she'd seen sense.

With Tali and Legion however, it was a different matter. After a few tense moments however, he finally thought up something that he

was sure could diffuse the situation.

"Tali, your father was running brutal experiments. If the subjects had been human, I'd damn well be telling the Alliance about it." he said.

"I know. But if the Geth find out..."

"They'd attack, which would cause a war that would leave both the Quarians and the Geth vulnerable when the Reapers show up. Is that what you want Legion?"

"We believed it was necessary to relay the information." said Legion.

"Sooner or later you're both gonna have to stop fighting this war, or we'll all end up paying for it." said Austin.

There was a brief silence, and then Legion spoke.

"To facilitate unit cohesion, we will not transmit data regarding Creator plans." he said.

Tali seemed to relax at this and lowered his weapon.

"Thank you, Legion. I... understand your intention. What if I gave you some non-classified data to send?" she suggested.

"We would be grateful." Said Legion.

Tali activated her omni tool and gave Legion the data.

Austin breathed another sigh of relief and smiled. That had gone a lot better than he had expected.

# 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 SILENT I LOVE YOU

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

(Scene:  
he's sitting on his floor  
pages are scattered all around him  
drawings, photos, hair locks  
all are kept on the pages  
he sighs  
he falls backwards  
he lays, staring at the roof until morning  
his eyes tinge red)

Now how do you feel  
Unresponsive?  
You tore his heart out again  
Oh well?  
I can't believe you  
I trusted his heart to you  
I thought he'd be happy  
You think he's useless?  
Think again, smartass  
He's great  
Why can't you realize  
I love him?  
No-  
No-  
No-  
I can't  
Now can I?  
I just want him to be happy,  
without me  
I'm not deserving  
Now, think about him  
Show the love he deserves  
All that and more  
And don't think you can break him again  
I won't let you

(Scene:  
A knock echos in the room  
He looks up

He opens the door  
His heart stops dead in it's tracks  
A girl stands there  
Her long, platinum blonde hair is curled  
Again  
She says she loves him  
she's not sorry  
She says she's sorry  
His heart jumps  
She hides a small smirk  
her skin looks like an orange  
she doesn't deserve him  
He smiles brightly  
His eyes seem to be lively again  
She kisses him  
Wasting no time to steal his heart again  
she'll break it in a few days time  
I can assure you  
But he'll never admit it  
"It's a bit rocky,"  
he'll say)

Good, he's happy  
Let me go?  
Why should I  
You'll break his heart  
Stay in your room,  
or I'll expose you for what you are  
A cheater?  
Why so worried  
You're far from that  
You're a monster

(Scene:  
A short girl sits in her room,  
a pillow is hugged to her chest  
she's crying  
but she won't admit it  
His picture is in her hands  
a heart is drawn,  
just a pinprick,  
in the corner  
"I don't love him"  
she'll lie when asked  
"He's just a friend"

Her hair is cut  
raggedly  
she wasn't looking  
she thought he might like it  
she made a mistake  
*again)*

I love you  
the girl whispers miserably,  
But you don't love me  
You never will  
He looks at her from the videogame  
she let him have first player  
"Hm?"  
"Nothing."  
she won't gather the courage  
she won't make him hate her  
just yet

# THE MIRROR'S DECEPTION

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

My arm is tensed against yours.  
A battle till the end  
Why do we continue to fight?  
Looking back, it was all so simple.  
Uppercut  
Dodge  
Counter attack  
We were better than that.  
Words like ninja stars  
Poison edge  
Seeping through the smallest wound  
No mercy for the fallen.  
I remember too well  
How you acted.  
I will not lose anything else to you.  
My arm strains  
A mirror between us  
We look the same  
but we are so completely different.  
I can never accept this side of myself  
You pull me  
The secret part of my life  
A burden clinging to my back  
Ivory black.  
I'm not strong enough  
I have to adapt.

The mirror shatters.

# WINGS OF GLASS

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

The door slams with a resounding thud  
The air is empty with silence  
Void of sound  
It's deafening

My hands are trembling weakly  
I can feel the lava coursing through my veins  
And it cools and turns to frost  
I am alone

Forever.  
Forever and a day  
But it won't last  
I know

This constant chill, this constant burn  
The fluctuations drag my mind all over the place  
Music plays and fills my head  
There's a disquieting absence of rational thought

If hearts were made out of glass  
Cliche as the thought might be  
I curl into a ball and wonder  
Would mine still be considered a 'heart'?

I can feel them as shards of broken glass  
I can see them piercing my soul  
With weapons and fragments of feelings  
With daggers and poison of jealousy and guilt  
With hammers and spears of hatred and sorrow

If hearts were made of glass  
Why do I feel mine beating so weakly?  
Why does the constant throbbing remind me so  
Of the worthlessness of my self?

It's disgusting. It's pitiful.  
The tears spill silently, as I muffle my screams into a pillow  
I lie restless, breaths strained and painful



I hate this.

If hearts were made of glass.. Mine would be a heap of tainted pieces.

I wonder, can I form these broken shards into wings?  
Transceding wings, that disappear in the light  
I wonder, if I gather enough pieces of glass  
If I spill enough of life-giving blood on these, that were thrown away  
like me  
Can I fly away?

Leaving everything behind, leaving everyone behind  
Leaving even my very self behind  
I'll unwillingly collect the glass, the broken, tainted fragments and  
shards of my not nonexistant heart  
And I'll fly away one day  
I'll give up on everything, and fly away;

On transparent wings of glass

# LAUGHING

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

Laughing, laughing.  
Over and over and over.  
Stop! Shut up!  
Get out of my head!  
Are you laughing at me?  
Are you even laughing,  
Or are you just a voice,  
Just a soundtrack?  
Over and over.  
Driving me crazy.  
Already crazy.  
What am I now?  
Will this ever end?

# A POEM FOR EM

Valkyrie  
of <http://universalcombat.deviantart.com>

Hello everyone! This is my first time submitting my work to such a large audience, so I'm definitely looking forward to it! I hope you all like it, and any feedback, be it via email or dA, would mean so much to me! Thanks all, and enjoy. -Valkyrie

I must be, what I must be,  
and write a poem, for you, for me.

What makes me want to write, I will never truly know.  
I simply look into my heart, and the words, they all just flow.

When I started this poem, I wasn't quite sure where to start,  
but after thinking for a while, I found the answer in my heart.

Because all the words that I write here, are for and about you.  
I don't have to make things up, cause the things I say are true.

Every little detail, every sentence, every phrase,  
When I'm writing them for you, I could go with on with them for days.

Sometimes I sit and wonder, just how it came to be,  
that a girl as amazing as you, hooked up with a guy like me.

You're selflessly kind, always strong, and always brave.  
It shows, not just in your thoughts, but also how you behave.

You'd always pick yourself up, every time you'd fall,  
and the only thing you wanted, was happiness, forever, for all.

Add to your personality, beauty beyond compare,  
and you have the amazing girl, for whom I deeply care.

And I know I say this all the time, but still I think it's not enough,  
cause to say everything about how I feel would be pretty freakin' tough.  
And so I wrote a poem, filled with how I feel and stuff,  
in hopes that you'll give me a chance, just one little chance, for love.