

Fanatical Publishing's

Weekly Review

Issue #82

December 30, 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 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.

You can include the text of your story in the body of the email, attached as an RTF, you can put in a link to your story on some webpage. 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!

Table of Contents

Original Prose

LET'S PLAY DETECTIVE?, FaerieBox
Page 5

GOODNIGHT LITTLE BABE, Rebekkah Spencer
Page 8

Fan fiction

ME₃ THE HELLDIVER SAGA, THE LAST CYCLE: CHAPTER
1: THE BEGINNINGS OF THE END, Veyron722Skyhook
Page 11

Poetry

SET FREE, TheMeTheyDontSee
Page 29

A SLEEPY REFLECTION, Shashank Gopikrishna
Page 30

HUNTING OF THE JOB, Kela Lewis-Morin
Page 32

IF GIVEN THE CHANCE, Fairygal11
Page 33

ORIGINAL LITERATURE

LET'S PLAY DETECTIVE?

CHAPTER 8

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

It was only on the following day that we really went into the library.

The library was perfectly clear and clean now, when the police guys were gone. However, when we entered – first time after all that which happened – I think I imagined seeing a shadow, like a bloodstain, on the surface of the dark wooden floor, next to the low octagonal table and the large armchairs. I shuddered gazing at it, a sudden chill running down my spine. The weather also didn't help to scare the new ghosts away.

Yeah. Aunt Daisy and the gardener had proved to be right at their previsions. The sun had gone, and the day was grey again, and very rainy, with no prospects of getting any better, by the way. If it was to change, was for worse.

We surely couldn't go out in this weather. We were completely locked inside CliffVerge Lodge. So, library.Books.

Many books.I let out a puff of exertion and staggered slightly on my feet, as Sister dropped another mystery one on my outstretched arms. They were already more than half a dozen. And they were heavy.

"Why do you need so many books, Alice?" I complained. "You certainly can't read all of them now!"

She dropped another one from the shelf. It fell right on top of the others.

"This, my dear Carrie, is called research." she responded "Agatha Christie, Simenon, Conan Doyle, if you insist. Literary basis. It's good for you."

I didn't argue, though my arms were hurting. I just glanced away, annoyed. And in the right time.

Because the recently oiled hinges barely squeaked when our cousin Maxwell came into the room. I watched him, curious and aware. He looked around briefly and finally to our side, landing on us. His eyes were brown, like my Mother's are, and like Grandpa's were.

When he wasn't smiling, his eyes looked piercing and scary. And I realized this last one because he wasn't smiling now.

He walked straight for us. I nudged Sister worriedly on her hip, to draw her attention. She turned back her head, staring at him too.

Maxwell stopped no more than a few feet from us, and folded his arms, glaring down at us with a defiant expression. He spoke:

"I know what you're doing."

I blinked, surprised. Sister suddenly forgot her ‘research’. Without a word, she released her grasp on one of the taller shelves and hopped down to the floor, very secure. For her expression, I could bet she hadn’t accepted that address.

“Sorry?” she asked, lifting her brows and also crossing her arms over her chest, equally defiant.

Maxwell rolled his eyes and nodded to the books.

“I know it all.” he repeated. He looked just frighteningly serious. He went on: “Wasn’t hard to find out. All the questions, and the covered inquires. You were talking to my sis last evening.” he gave an especial emphasis to this, his voice dripping loathe, as if throwing an accusation “You’re trying to discover the truth about Grandfather’s death.”

I read a really not nice word crossing my sister’s mind, in spite of her poker face. Our Grandmother by father side had already caught my twin by her ear and put red pepper on her tongue, once.

“Fuck off.” she replied to Maxwell.

And still wearing the poker face.

He laughed. A loud and arrogant laughter, quite cynical too. Wasn’t pleasant. Was a revolting noise. He asked, wearing a lopsided grin?

“Well, that was a quick confirmation, wasn’t it?”

“It’s not of your business.” Alice said.

“Yes, it is.” our cousin retorted, suddenly unfolding his arms, into a more relaxed posture. A ‘let’s really talk to each other instead of arguing’ body language.

Despite everything, I held my twin’s arm, so that he had a chance to speak. It was the way he had done it. Something of preoccupation about being kicked away, or I was getting nuts. Of course, it made me curious. Think - it was urgent. What else would bring him to us, after all?

Maxwell answered my doubts. With a slight quickness behind his boss-always-right-and-in-control-of-all mask.

“Look.” he said. “We all know that this Sheppard inspector is useless. So let’s be rational beings. I don’t want our Grandpa’s murder to end unsolved. It has to be *fair*. We want justice, don’t we?” he inquired.

I was thinking. Sister only stared, with a moody frown between her brows.

“I’m here to make a proposal to you.” he added.

Our cousin let a calculated blanket of silence fall around us three, as he also glanced at us, his eyes grave. Grave, but even so lit coldly by that very familiar flame. That one which burned inside our own eyes – mine and Sister’s – when we were angry. A family thing, I suppose.

Well, I said that Maxwell looked deep into our eyes, oozing determination. Then, as the good actor he was, he brushed away the silence, and said, stretching out his right hand:

“Let’s join forces.”

GOODNIGHT LITTLE BABE

Rebekkah Spencer
of <http://beckymay21.deviantart.com/>

Even as I closed my eyes, gritting my teeth, determined not to make a noise, I knew it was too late. Even as I neared the basket to settle the baby, to stroke her soft, delicate hands; she was the only thing that mattered in the whole world. The door sprung open. She cried harder. My whole body tightened as I watched her. He had drawn closer, reaching out for her tiny body, murder glinting furiously in his dark, bloodshot eyes. It was as though the whole of time had slowed. Before I even knew what I was doing, my fist had made contact with his thick leather coat. I only had time to glance at the heavy metal cross beating fiercely against his chest, before I hit the ground. I heard the slight rattle of his belt before the thick, studded buckle tore mercilessly through my flesh. As the pain in my body became unbearable, my mind left it. From here I could see the man clearly. I heard his demands for repentance over the cries of my baby sister. My beautiful sister. I even heard myself, squirming, grunting; whimpering like a wounded animal. But this didn't matter; she was still crying, still watching the man and the animal he punished. So I went to her and as I approached she stopped crying. Curiously, she reached out to me, her tiny hands stretching towards my own.

As I took hold of her we flew.

We rose high and I knew we would never have to stop. Looking past the trees, it was all but a pin prick; the house, our father, a mere ant to the giants now. And now we were giants. We had the power now to go wherever we wanted, to do whatever we will; we were free. The trees flowed with the wind below us and the birds flew past as we watched.

Gradually we set down far from the house, even though he couldn't hurt us now, we didn't want to go back. The faint light was flooding through the trees.

"Just like in the stories I told you" and I reminded her how they ended, as the warm air settled around us, "and when all was better and they finally escaped, they were free. And they had no fear or pain but they slept, and then, when they woke, they woke to a place more beautiful than they had ever seen before. The children saw their mother again and they stayed there forever in the beautiful place... All we have to do now is sleep"

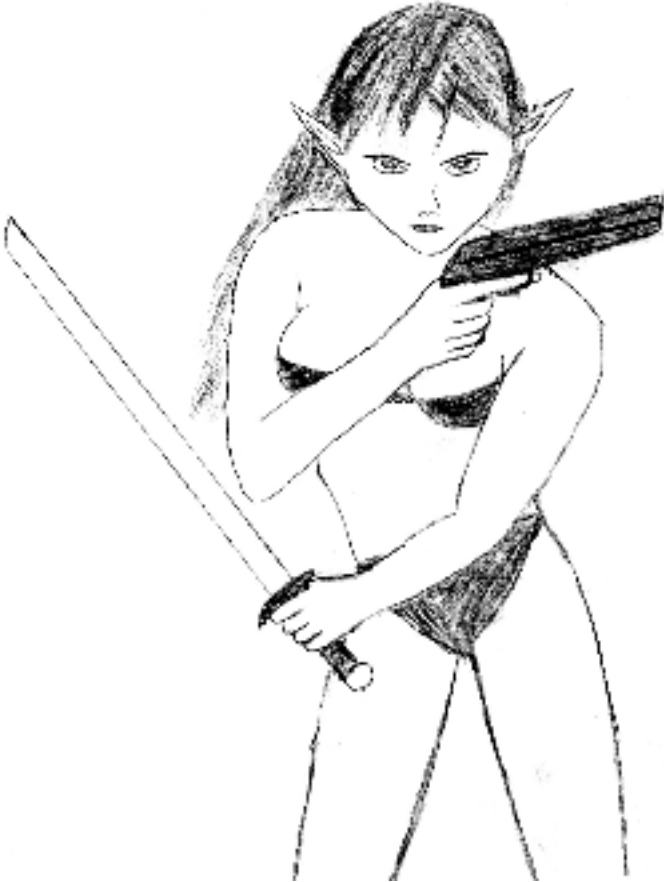
I looked up at the vast canopy, hardly daring to hope. We lay down and I knew it was over. I sang softly to her and then, as she fell asleep I closed my eyes and the light, at last, was gone.

The bodies weren't discovered for days later. There were no neighbours to the tiny cottage. Most in the village didn't even know there were children living there. In the distance a long caravan of police vehicles were drawing their way up the winding road. A tall middle aged man was stepping out of a car whilst, all around him, the rest of the team set up the wall of tape; barring the house like soldiers defending a castle. He pushed open the door with his gloved hands and immediately covered his face. The scene on entering the house was horrific. The sickening sweet smell lingered, mingling with the metallic meaty stench of congealed blood. A swarm of flies swept past him as he stepped inside. He flicked on his torch cautiously, taking out a worn old camera and scanned the room. He fumbled the buttons of the camera nervously, before drawing further into the room and up the narrow staircase.

There was a small, malnourished boy close to him; though he was hardly a boy anymore. His face to the ground, he'd have thought him an animal, meat after the slaughter; but for the ripped, tattered rags that hung from him. The sight disgusted him, but he held back the vomit that threatened to force its way up his throat and clicked the shutter again. It was just another job, he told himself; he closed his eyes and then, reluctantly, he set to work.

The report was simple enough to write, until it came to the baby. Eventually he put the fatality down to cot death; though, in truth, he couldn't be sure what had killed her. The boy showed clear signs of abuse and he assumed the punctured lung or the blood loss had been the cause of death. That would need more analysis of course, the autopsy would be telling, but the father was the obvious perpetrator. The baby, however, showed no marks. She had not been suffocated; as then, her lips would have turned blue... There were no broken bones and no damage to her organ tissue. There wasn't even any clear sign of starvation. In the end however, he sent the report as it was; child, male, 7, death by GBH from father's physical abuse. Child, female, 13 months, death unknown, suspected cot death, no suggestion of bodily harm.

FAN FICTION



or: Leanna's Return

Your Fan Fiction is published here for free, but if you want to help keep it free, check out some other things I publish, like

ME₃ THE HELLDIVER SAGA, THE LAST CYCLE:

CHAPTER 1: THE BEGINNINGS OF THE END

Veyron722skyhook

Midday dawned over Earth. He found it strange that everyone was spending this day as though it were just like any other. If they knew what he knew... things would be very different.

Sir Major Austin Shepard stood leant over a balcony overlooking the huge vista of the city of . He couldn't help but smile slightly as he looked at the roof of a nearby building, watching a child playing with a model of a Human Systems Alliance fighter.

Austin Shepard was a Helldiver, one of the finest soldiers in the galaxy.

Many years ago, the ancient and wise race known as the Arkanes had discovered an ancient technology on their homeworld that predated all life by over 65 million years. From that technology, they had built the Helldivers. Hugely advanced armour that someone could slip inside and control almost like a second skin. Originally intended only for the Arkanes, the Helldivers had evolved over the years until today when they were a multi species program dedicated to the freedom and protection of all.

For over 15 years Austin had been a part of this. For 10 years he had served along his team, Alpha Squad, who were all sat behind him enjoying their shore leave. It was 5 years ago however that he had made a discovery that had changed everything.

50,000 years ago, an ancient race known as the Protheans vanished, never to be seen again. Even to this day, the cause of their extinction was disputed. However, Austin and those close to him knew the truth. Through a Prothean beacon, he had seen a message from the Protheans, a warning against the source of their extinction. An ancient and immortal race of machines known as the Reapers. They had wiped out the Protheans and many other race of organic life before them. This cycle of extinction had continued for who knows how long. And now the time had come again. What had started out a mission to hunt down a rouge agent, who he had been assigned, had revealed the truth. The Reapers were returning to once again continue the cycle and eradicate them and all life. Using this, he and many friends he had met during his journey, including the Asari who would later become his wife, he had stopped the rouge agents plan and

defeated the Reaper's vanguard, Sovereign. This however had not stopped the Reaper invasion, it had only delayed it.

A year or so later, Austin had crossed paths with one of the Reaper's servants, a mysterious race known as the Collectors. This unfortunate encounter had resulted in him being killed in action. However, it had not been the end of him. For it seemed that the Helldiver suit he wore changed a lot of the rules.

For two years, the armour had slowly rebuilt and healed his body until he had essentially been brought back from the dead. Returning to active duty, Austin had been given a new ship, had his old team reassigned back to his command and had even been reunited with the love of his life. With Alpha's help, and the help of a team from the outside, Austin had taken the fight to the Collectors after they had started abducting thousands of human colonists out in the Terminus systems. They had fought them in their own base and destroyed them.

Once again however, it was far from over. Humanity now had the full attention of the Reapers and although they were heading the long way, they were coming. Shortly after, Austin had found out that the Reapers might arrive earlier and had been forced to destroy a Mass Relay to delay them a bit longer and buy the galaxy some more time to prepare.

That had been two years ago. That time had been put to very good use. For those past years, Austin and his team had worked and trying to rally as many as possible to their side and to try and get the word out, for there were those who refused to believe that the Reapers existed.

At the moment however, Austin and Alpha were all on shore leave. They gone for a long time without a break, and the Major wanted his team to be ready for when the time came. The expected two years had passed so it was only a matter of time until the Reapers did eventually arrive, there was no denying that. In fact, it was fair to say that all they had left now was borrowed time.

Austin however brought his thoughts back to now. He looked behind to see his squad all chatting with each other. Alpha Squad was a combination of many different species. Human, Turian, Quarian, Krogan and Asari. Each one of them had their own set of skills and traits that benefitted the squad in some ways.

Alaara T'onrak

Asari. Second in command.

Child of two Asari matriarchs known for their many explicit porn vids. Former Eclipse soldier before defecting to the Helldivers. Skilled in both combat training and biotics. Married to Alpha's comm specialist, Sandra Whryte. Been with Alpha since its beginning, 15 years ago.

Sandra Whryte

Human. Field comm specialist.

Born with Russian heritage. Born and grew up on the streets of America during which she acquired a talent and skills in listening in on conversations which evolved in comm talent. Joined the Helldivers at the age of 19. Married to Captain Alaara T'onrak. Also been part of Alpha for 15 years.

Alex Wilson/Griffin

Human. Demolition Expert.

Born and grew up on Omega. Little known of parents. Very briefly a member of the Blue Suns before cutting all ties. Boyfriend of Ashley Madeline Williams, Austin's childhood friend. Alpha Squad's second newest member, recruited by Captain T'onrak during the two years of Austin's death. Nicknamed Griffin by his teammates due to the Griffin tattoo on his armour.

Ventra Prarken

Turian. Sniper/archer expert.

Very briefly a part of both the Turian military and C-sec before becoming a Helldiver. Skilled primarily in archery and prefers to use a high tech bow and arrow. Married to Leena Raan vas Penthra. Also part of Alpha for 15 years.

Leena Raan vas Penthra

Quarian. Engineer.

Born on the Migrant fleet like all Quarians. Never returned from her pilgrimage after she became a Helldiver. Hoped to remain with a former lover, only to find he had killed shortly after her enrolment. Married to Ventra Prarken. Once again part of Alpha since the beginning.

Urldnot Kraan

Krogan. Heavy Weapon expert.

One of few lucky Krogan to survive birth due to the Genophage. Served as a member of the Blood Pack for a time after passing his rite of passage before quitting and becoming a Helldiver. Part of Alpha for 15 years.

Dashiell Torres/Dash

Human. Scout.

Born on the colony of Mindoir. Survived the Batarian slaver attack, but saw his parents die. Joined the Helldivers as soon as he turned 18. Well known among Alpha for his often eccentric sense of humour,

and tendency to talk a lot. Part of Alpha since the beginning.

X-5

Experimental robot and AI.

Created as part of an experimental robot program that was eventually shut down by Alpha Squad. Was activated in an attempt to stop them but was somehow struck by lightning. After reactivation, started to develop an organic personality and characteristics. Became a Helldiver agent in return for information and a small service. Occasionally joined Alpha Squad on many missions, most recently to defeat the Collectors. Was made an official member of Alpha Squad not long after.

Each one of them were simply chatting to one another, enjoying the free time they had. Then of course there was also Alpha's very newest recruit, Natasha Soarin a.k.a Jet.

What made Jet very special was that she was one of the first of a new breed of Helldivers. Very recently, the Arkanes had finally found a way of creating some new Helldivers that had the ability that no other Helldiver had, the power of flight.

According to Jet's profile, she had been born and raised on Arkadia all her life, living on one of the small colony settlements outside the Arkadian city. She enlisted, and eventually became an Atmospheric fighter pilot. One of the best, she eventually earned the nickname Jet from her wingmen.

She had handpicked by the Arkane Council to be one of the very first of the flying Helldivers. She had been reluctant at first, but had eventually accepted. She had now been assigned to Alpha Squad a few months after she had donned her armour.

It was easy to tell among the others which one Jet was. Her armour design was completely different to the others. True her armour still had the same triangular shaped helmet design that all Helldiver had to have, but that was it.

From every angle, Jet's armour was designed to look like a Stealth fighter and to be as aerodynamic as possible. She even had two massive wings on her back. At the moment of course, they were folded away so as not to be an inconvenience. When deployed, these wings not only aided in flight but also helped keep the Helldiver's power levels charged.

Because the technology in the flying Helldivers was still new, it was in a way experimental. For example, the flight mechanics did use a lot of power, more than a Helldiver's power core was able to recharge. So, to try and balance the power out, the wings were massive solar panels which could absorb power from any light source and provide

additional power to keep the core power levels stable.

Jet's flight technology was pretty simple. She had the main thrusters concealed inside her feet. As a safety feature, her legs would lock together so that the pilot didn't accidentally put them at the wrong angle. Jet of course would unlock them once she came in to land. She also had two small stabilizers on her back and two more large ones concealed in her hands. These stabilizers were so powerful that they could actually double as weapons. Jet however tended not to use them in combat much as they did use a lot of power.

Jet's main weapons of course were the assault rifle sized rail gun she carried, flamethrowers concealed in her wrists, and finally a massive war hammer which served as her melee weapon.

Austin planned to rejoin his squad eventually. Help take his mind off of things. For now though, he was thinking. As said before, he knew the Reapers were coming, so it did make him uneasy. He continued looking out over the city view as his shoulder cape flowed in the wind.

Not long after he and his team had stopped the Collectors, the Major had changed, or rather updated, his appearance. He now had a slightly larger build than his previous look, he carried a blood dragon emblem on his chest and also the shoulder parts from the armour he had taken that symbol from. The cape had been given to him after he had been knighted for stopping the Collectors. It served as a symbol to others of the authority he now carried as a knight. Of course, his usual parts were there. His sword, Excalibur and the N7 designations on his right arm and chest.

"Not joining us, Major?" he heard someone ask.

Jet had got up from her seat and had joined him at the balcony.

"Just thinking." He replied, his British accented voice deepened slightly by his suit's voice changer.

"You miss your wife, don't you?" Jet asked.

She was right. Austin had been missing his Asari wife, Liara T'soni Shepard, for some time now.

They had met five years ago during the time that Austin had first seen the visions from the beacons. Somehow, it had been love at first sight for them and they had quickly become bond mates. His death four years ago had been a huge loss for her, but it had led her to joining the Helldivers herself, so when his suit finally managed to bring him back, they were quickly reunited. Having already joined Alpha Squad, Liara accompanied her love on his mission to stop the Collectors. During that time, the two mended their relationship and Austin eventually proposed to her. They were married not long after.

At the moment however, Liara was not with them. Recently she'd received a call regarding something to do with the Protheans (for which she was a Professor in) and had needed to take a temporary leave of absence. She had assured her husband of course that it would only be a week and that she would return as soon as she could. Even so, they loved each other so much that to simply apart for one day felt very lonely for them.

"Yeah. It always feels lonely without her." He said.

"She'll be back tomorrow though, won't she? I'd say that's something to look forward to." Said Jet.

That was indeed true. The week had passed now, so Liara was bound to return some time tomorrow. Austin did smile at the thought of that. He and Liara completed each other, so they always felt truly alive in each others company.

At that moment, a man suddenly walked up to them and saluted.

"Major."

"Lieutenant James Vega." Said Austin warmly. "What brings you here?"

Vega was an Alliance soldier that Austin had been introduced to not too long ago. He wore a white Alliance t-shirt and combat trousers. His dog tags were clearly visible above his shirt.

"I've been sent by the defence comity. They want to see you." He said.

Austin simply nodded and turned to Jet.

"Let the others know where I've gone. Don't want them getting worried." He said.

"Yes sir." Jet nodded.

Vega led Austin through the Alliance headquarters. All over the place, there were people hurrying to different places. The Helldiver didn't recall it being this busy before.

"What's this all about, Vega?" he asked.

"Couldn't say, sir. Just told me they needed." James replied.

Austin was aware that his presence might also be adding to it. After all, he was a Major, a Helldiver and a Knight. So he knew he had a huge air of authority around here.

A familiar face then stepped out of the crowds. An Alliance Admiral that Austin had known for a long time.

"Anderson." He acknowledged.

"Admiral." Vega saluted.

Since Austin was technically the same rank as Anderson, being a Major and also perhaps being slightly above him due to being a knight, he had no need to salute.

"Good to see you again, Shepard. Like your new look. It suits

you.” Said Anderson as he and Austin shook hands. “How have things been for you?”

“As well as they could’ve been.” Austin replied. “What’s going on? Why is everyone in such a hurry?”

“Admiral Hackett’s mobilizing the fleets. I guess words made it to Alliance Command that something big is heading our way.” Said Anderson.

“The Reapers?” Austin asked with concern.

“We don’t know, not for certain.” Said Anderson.

“What else could be.” Said Austin, folding his arms.

“If I knew that...” said Anderson.

“It’s the Reapers, Anderson. And you know that the Alliance is not ready for them, not by a long shot.” Said Austin.

“Tell that to the defence comity.” Said Anderson.

“Unless we’re planning to talk the Reapers to death, the comity is just a waste of time. Besides, if the Reapers are indeed on our doorstep, I have more important places I need to be.” Said Austin.

“They’re just scared. None of them have seen what you’ve seen. You’ve been there, on the front lines, in the trenches, fighting them. We’ve seen your reports, seen the evidence you’ve collected. But it’s all just theory to us.” Said Anderson.

“So you expect me to just tell them it’s gonna be okay? Hide the truth, like the Council?” Austin retorted crossly. He was still a bit angry at the Alliance for not preparing better. Compared to the Helldivers and the Arkanes, the Alliance had barely done anything to prepare for the invasion.

“You know that’s not true!” Anderson objected. “The shit you’ve done... any other Helldiver soldier would’ve just been ignored by the committee. It’s your knowledge of the Reapers that’s made them listen to you.”

“That and you’re good word?” Austin asked coldly.

“Yeah. I trust you, Shepard, and so does the committee.” Said Anderson.

“If they trusted me, they would’ve prepared more. Besides, I’m just a soldier, Anderson. And I am not being a politician just for this.” Said Austin.

“I don’t need you to be either.” Said Anderson. “I just need to do whatever it takes to help us stop the Reapers.”

They proceeded through HQ a bit more before finally arriving outside the meeting place.

“They’re expecting you too, Admiral.”

“Good luck in there, Shepard.” Said Vega.

Austin simply nodded as he and Vega shook hands. Anderson meanwhile had just run into Austin’s oldest friend.

“Anderson.” Said Ashley Williams.

“Lieutenant, how’d it go in there?” Anderson asked.
“I don’t know. I can never tell with them. I’m just waiting for orders.” Said Ashley. She then noticed her old friend. “Austin!”

Austin turned and saw Ashley.

“Ash! Good to see you again.” He smiled as he walked up to Ashley and hugged her.

“It’s been too long. You look good.” Said Ashley.

“So do you, my old friend.” Said Austin.

“You here on your own?” Ashley asked.

“No, everyone else is here with me. I can let Griffin know you’re here if you want.” He smiled, seeing where Ashley was going with this.

“Nah. Why spoil the surprise for him.” Ashley winked.

Ever since Alpha had saved Ashley on the colony of Horizon two years ago, Ashley and Griffin had grown very close to another. It was during Austin’s wedding when Griffin had accidentally caught the flowers that he and Ash had made their relationship official.

At that moment however, an Alliance officer walked up to them.

“Admiral, Major, they ready for you now.” She said.

Austin and Ashley simply nodded to each other as the Helldiver followed Anderson into the court room.

“You know the Major?” Vega asked.

“Childhood friend. He and I go way back.” Said Ashley.

“Are you two...”

“No. Besides, he’s married, and I’m seeing one of his squad.”

Austin couldn’t help but see the many Alliance faces staring at him. They’d no doubt heard the hundreds of stories about him.

The defence committee sat before Austin and Anderson. There was no denying that all of them were hoping for answers.

“Admiral Anderson. Sir Major Shepard.”

“Well, what’s the situation?” Austin asked.

“We were hoping you would tell us.” Said one of the committee members.

“The reports coming in are unlike anything we’ve ever seen. Whole colonies have gone dark, bases gone silent.” Said another.

“The only thing you’ve done by bringing me here is confirm what you already know and what I’ve been trying to tell you for years. The Reapers are here.” Said Austin.

The committee mumbled amongst themselves before speaking again.

“Then how do we stop them?”

“Stop them?” Austin asked in surprise. “This isn’t about strategy or tactics. This is about survival.”

“But, their must be some way...”

“If there is, then I will find it. But you all need to be prepared to do what you need to survive.” Said Austin.

“That’s it? That’s our plan?!”

“You have a better alternative?! If so, please share!” Austin retorted.

“UK headquarters has a visual.”

The massive holoscreen lit up with several video links. There was no mistaking the familiar cuttlefish design of the ships. It was indeed the Reapers. Austin did his best to hide the shock that the Reapers were laying siege to London, to the UK, the place his family hailed from.

“What do we do?”

Austin knew this day would come eventually. Long had he known he had a destiny. A destiny that he would soon have to become more than just a squad leader. On the day the Reapers arrived, he would have to become a leader that the whole galaxy could follow. Starting from now, Austin knew he that now they would all be looking to him for answers and leadership.

“The only thing we can. We fight, we give them hell, or we die.” He replied.

The committee was silent for a while. The fear and suddenness of all this was a lot for them to take in.

“We should get to the Normandy.” Austin suggested as he turned to Anderson.

Suddenly, the whole place shook. Everyone looked out the massive window to see a Reaper descending from the sky, a beam aimed right at them.

“Oh my god!”

The whole place exploded, sending almost everyone and everything flying. A huge amount of fire quickly followed, burning everything in its path.

Austin quickly noticed that Anderson had been thrown to the floor by the blast and wouldn’t escape the flames in time. The Helldiver quickly threw himself around the Admiral, protecting him from the flames.

Austin of course had no need to worry about the fire hurting him. His armour was designed to withstand far worse without any damage. Even his cape had been soaked in a special flame proof liquid to stop it from being burnt.

When the flames finally did subside, the whole place was in ruins. Austin looked down to see that Anderson was alive, but unconscious.

“Anderson! Come on, wake up!” he yelled.

Anderson stirred and opened his eyes.

“Come on, get up.” Said Austin, helping the Admiral up. He then took a spare pistol from his combat belt and handed it to Anderson. “Here, take this.”

Anderson took the pistol as Austin finished helping him up. The Helldiver then tried to make contact with the rest of his team.

“Alpha Squad, do you read me? Alaara, come in.” he said.

No reply.

“I can’t contact anyone else. The Reapers must be disrupting communication.” Said Austin. “Come on. We should head to the spaceport at least. If I know Alpha as well as I do, that’s where they’ll go to if they can’t contact us.”

Anderson nodded and followed Austin’s lead as he led them across the rooftops. Getting outside did at least allow comms to temporarily improve.

“Anderson, I’m getting something. Sounds like Ashley and Vega are heading to the Normandy as well.” Said Austin.

“HUSKS!”

Sure enough, several zombie like figures were heading in their direction. Human converted and repurposed by the Reapers. Deadly, and very hard to kill.

Anderson fired with his pistol while Austin unholstered his M-76 Revenant and fired also.

“I’m out of ammo!” Anderson yelled after just a few shots.

Austin also suddenly felt his rifle click and realised he didn’t have any more thermal clips. It certainly wasn’t the best time.

“Guess we’ll have to take these things out the old fashioned way.” Said Austin, drawing Excalibur from his back.

Two more husks ran at them. Anderson used the butt of the pistol to hit one of them hard in the head, killing it, while Austin cut it down completely.

Another Reaper overheard suddenly fire din their direction, creating a massive hole in the roof.

“Down here. We’re too exposed on the roof.” Said Austin, as he jumped down through the hole.

Anderson quickly followed.

The door they were about to head through was suddenly forced open as a Husk tried to claw at them. Austin however simply decapitated it with his sword.

Anderson tried to force the door open again, but found it too stiff. Austin on the other hand did it with relative ease due to his armour’s strength.

“Through this way, hurry.” He grunted, keeping the door open long enough for Anderson to slip through.

As they continued through the buildings, they eventually heard the sounds of gunfire. There were more soldiers nearby. Sure enough,

they found a small army of Alliance marines engaging large amounts of husks.

“We can’t just leave them.” Said Anderson.

“That I agree with.” Austin nodded.

The two quickly joined the fray. One of the marines threw them some thermal clips, allowing Anderson to reload. Austin meanwhile stuck to close up combat and used both his sword in his right hand and his omni blade/shield on his left wrist.

“Hold your positions! Hold your positions!” he yelled.

The presence of both Austin and Anderson seemed to bolster the marines motivation and they fought even harder. Husk after husk fell as they were shot, punched or cut down. The scale seemed to be tipping in their favour. Eventually in fact, the Husks did something they’d never done before. All of them retreated and ran.

All the marines cheered as the cyborg zombies fled out of sight. Austin however did not share the same feelings. In fact, this new move had him very uneasy. He could tell that Anderson felt it too.

“Something’s not right. Husks never retreat.” He said. “Reload and be ready! I don’t think this is over yet!”

The marines complied and took this opportunity to reload and see to any wounded. Things seemed quiet for a while, but then they heard something.

A loud roar suddenly echoed around the city. Then the wind started to pick up as they heard another noise. It was a noise like a hurricane coming down from the north. The trees seemed to creak and crack in the hot, dry wind.

“What was that?” Anderson asked, doing his best to not be knocked over the sudden strong wind.

“Sentries, what can you see?!” Austin yelled to some snipers who were posted on the roof.

The snipers looked around for a moment. Then they saw something. They almost froze and went pale.

“Sound the alarm! Call for reinforcements, do it now!” one of them yelled.

“What is it?!” Austin shouted.

“Dragon.” The sentry replied. “DRAGON!”

Another roar sounded, this time much louder. That was when they saw it. A massive black form suddenly swooped out from behind a building and blotted out the sun. Sure enough, hovering above them, larger even than a Tutchunka Harvester, was a Dragon. It was only when Austin got a better look that he saw it wasn’t a normal Dragon, it was actually a husk. Clearly this husk had obviously been designed to look like a Dragon, and it certainly didn’t disappoint.

The Draco, as Austin felt it appropriate to be called, swooped down and opened it’s mouth. Sure enough, fire burst forth, consuming

anything it touched. Several marines were caught in the blast as they tired to retreat. The others opened fire on the massive husk as it turned for another run. This time though, it landed. This Dragon was like the traditional European dragons, so it had two legs and its wings doubled as arms, which supported it. It was now that everyone was able to get a look at this terrifying new monster. Two horns protruded from the Draco's head, and it had a short neck. This was a something a bit more new since a lot of Dragon designs often had long necks. The wings of course had a few scars and tears in them, as did the dragon's flesh. This was to be expected since it was a husk. The mouth however was the most terrifying. As it growled and roared it revealed its teeth. They weren't normal. In the Draco's mouth, in place of teeth, were several long spikes. The very same ones that were often used to impale victims on to turn them into husks, which unsurprisingly were called Dragon's teeth. The Draco drew itself up and breathed in as it prepared to breath more fire.

"Stand firm!" Austin yelled.

The Draco breathed another round of fire. The shear force of it was so strong that it sent debris all over the place. More marines screamed as the fire burned them alive. Cleared of nuisance, the Draco simply walked over them like they were nothing but tiny insects. These Alliance marines were nothing to the Husk. Unknown to them, its eye was set another prize...

Angered by the loss of the many marines, Austin holstered Excalibur and drew his Revenant out again, this time fully loaded.

"HEY!" he yelled to get the Draco's attention, firing several shots.

The shots didn't appear to hurt the Draco at all, but they did at least get its attention. The Dragon roared and breathed another round of fire right at Austin.

The Helldiver ducked as he felt the hot flames engulf him. As expected however, they didn't hurt him.

The Draco almost looked surprised when it saw that Austin was unharmed. It simply snarled and stared at the Helldiver as he stood up.

Everyone simply watched as the Draco glare at Austin. The Helldiver found the husk's stare strange, almost as though... it knew him.

Then suddenly the Dragon started shaking its head slightly, almost as though something was causing it pain. After just a few seconds, it stopped, and then its eyes opened again. No longer were they the traditional blue that al husks had. They were now a familiar bright glowing orange. Then to everyone's shock, the Draco actually spoke with a voice that Austin knew all too well.

“Shepard!”

“Harbinger.” Austin said coldly.

Harbinger was another Reaper who had been the true leader of the Collectors. Through the Collector general, it had influenced all their actions right up until they had all been destroyed. It was no surprise that it was controlling the Draco seeing as how Harbinger had been able to control any Collector it wished.

“You knew that this day would be coming, Shepard. The cycle could not be delayed forever. There is nothing you can do to stop us. All you can do is watch helplessly as all that you love and cherish is destroyed. You will suffer for your misguidance in thinking you had a chance against us.” the Draco spoke with Harbinger’s voice.

“You’re the one who’s misguided, Harbinger. You may think this cycle is no different from others before, but you’re wrong. We will find a way, and I will stop you!” said Austin, no fear at all in his voice, despite that he was facing a massive Dragon that could just bite into him.

“There will be no glory in your sacrifice, Shepard. We will erase all memory of you from history. The next cycle will never know you existed at all.” Harbinger growled.

“You’re right.” Said Austin. “Because their won’t be another cycle, One way or another, I intend to end it. Years from now, the future will know that a free galaxy stood against tyrants like you, that a untied few stood against many, and before this war was over... that even a race of machines like yours can bleed.”

Harbinger was silent for a moment before finally speaking again.

“Your death will serve as an example to all who would dare stand against us! Now watch as I burn your world! Releasing control.”

The Draco’s eyes returned to normal as Harbinger’s influence left it. It roared as soon as it saw Austin and lunged at him. The Helldiver was quick to react by rolling out of the way. As Austin retreated, the Draco once again breathed a huge amount of fire as it continued moving forward, unfazed by anything the Alliance tried in an attempt to slow it down.

Spotting Austin among the teeming masses, the Draco spat a fireball at him. Austin was quick to notice this and pulled Anderson into a trench, the fire just missing them. Several other marines did the same and took cover. The Draco once again released another round of fire, this time so large, intense and concentrated that it burned all that was left of the marines.

“NO!”

Anderson quickly stopped the soldier before he clambered out

of the trench and into the Draco's view.

"You can't do anything! They're gone!" he yelled.

Suddenly, the normal husks returned, this time accompanied by another new type of husk. The massive harvesters that originated from the Krogan planet Tuchanka it seemed hadn't escaped this fate either. Smaller than the Draco, but just as deadly, these Harvesters were dropping almost hundreds of human husks onto the battlefield while the swooped overhead. The Draco, believing all the marines to be dead took off into the air to join them.

"We can't hold! The city is lost." Said one of the marines.

Austin was forced to accept defeat. There were outmatched, outnumbered, and outgunned as well, despite that these husks didn't wield guns. Anderson knew it too.

"Tell everyone to break cover, NOW!" Austin ordered.

"Retreat! Retreat!"

What was left of the marines, Austin and Anderson jumped out of the trenches and ran as best they could.

"In here, quick!" Austin yelled, pulling Anderson into a nearby building.

The marines went to follow, but a red husk suddenly cut one of them down and exploded, causing the entrance to be sealed by debris. Austin and Anderson were safe, but they were now on their own again.

One surviving marine panted as he struggled to stay alive. The explosion from the red husk had taken its toll on him and he was bleeding badly. He could see more husks through his visor but they seemed to be ignoring him.

Then he suddenly heard footsteps. He looked to see a large figure towering over him. It was blocking out the sun, so he could only see its silhouettes. From what he could tell however, it looked humanoid. But at the same time it looked alien. Its anatomy was thin, almost... insect like.

The figure then suddenly took a large spear like weapon from its back and plunged it into the marine's heart. There was nothing he could do but choke on his own blood as the life left him.

Satisfyingly watching the marine take his last breath, the figure pulled the spear free.

"The age of humanity is over. The time of their extinction has come."

"This is a goddamn mess. How did we let this happen?!" said Anderson as he and Austin worked on trying to clear a path through the wreckage in an attempt to once again get to the Normandy. "They hit so fast, we thought we'd have time to prepare."

"You and the Alliance knew they were coming." Said Austin as

he held up a piece of debris for Anderson to crawl under.

“And they still just cut through our defences.” Said Anderson.
“We need to go to the Citadel, talk to the Council.”

“The Citadel? Anderson, the fight’s here! Besides, I need to also warn Arkadia in case the Reapers haven’t already invaded. We actually had plan that could work.”

“The fight will be everywhere soon enough.” Said Anderson.
“The council has to help us.”

“You honestly think they will?” Austin asked sarcastically as they started slowly making their way over a deep pit and trying to keep their balance.

“No. But you were a Council Spectre. That has to count for something.” Said Anderson.

“Don’t remind me.” Austin mumbled.

A sudden shake made Anderson lose his balance and he nearly fell. Just in time though, Austin caught him.

“Got ya!”

“Thanks, Shepard. I owe you one.” Anderson panted.

“Guess we’re even now.” Said Austin.

Reaching the other side, the two grabbed some ammo and head back outside. Another Reaper suddenly descended from the sky and landed in the water. It began firing on a nearby dreadnought as it walked.

“God! How do you stop something so powerful?” said Anderson as they broke into a sprint.

“I don’t know.” Austin replied.

The dreadnought suddenly exploded, causing the piece of debris they were standing on to give way. The two skidded down to a lower level. Austin was able to stay upright, but Anderson lost his footing.

“You okay?” Austin asked, helping the Admiral up.

“I’m getting too old for this sort of thing.” Anderson sighed.

The two jumped down another level before encountering some more marines.

“Get down! They’ll see you!” one of them whispered.

On the other side of the water were more husks. Once again though, these ones were new. They looked almost like... Batarians.

Both Austin and Anderson took cover as the Cannibals opened fire. Austin quickly activated his shoulder cannon which fired several shots of plasma, even when in cover. The last fell and Austin and Anderson went back to the marines.

“We’re trying to contact our ship. Do you have a radio?” Austin asked.

“There’s one in the downed gunship, but it will be crawling with those things.” Said one of the marines.

“That won’t be a problem.” Said Anderson, as he tried to lift the large piece of metal that had another marines leg pinned. “It’s too heavy for me.”

“I got it.” Said Austin as he slowly lifted it up. Even for him, it was very heavy.

“I wish I had Griffin for this.” He thought to himself.

Once the marine was clear, Austin dropped it. Now they had a bridge across the water.

“Come on, let’s get to that gunship.” He said.

Anderson followed.

They encountered a few more Cannibals before they finally found the radio.

“Keep me covered while I try to get a beacon up.” Said Austin.

The radio was extremely static, but he was just able to get Sandra’s voice.

“Shepard, do you read me? Are you getting this?”

“Barely. What’s your position?” Austin replied.

“We’re at the Normandy. What’s your location?” Sandra asked.

“I’m activating a beacon. Get Joker to home in on it’s signal.”

Said Austin.

Before he could get a reply, everything went completely static.

“Let’s hope it does the trick.” Said Anderson.

“They’ll find us. Alpha’s never let me down before.” Said Austin.

“Then let’s hope we can survive long enough. We’ve got company!” said Anderson, indicating to several incoming Cannibals.

Right before the husks could fire however, none other than the Normandy zoomed over firing shots which obliterated them all.

“Cavalry’s here gentlemen.” Said Joker.

“About time.” Said Anderson.

“Let’s move!”

The Normandy descended until the cargo hold hatch was low enough to get onto. Austin wasted no time and jumped on. TO his relief, everyone was here. Ashley, Vega, and all of Alpha.

“You had us worried there, Major.” Said Alaara.

“When I have I ever been that easy to kill?” Austin smiled.

“Shepard!” Anderson called.

“Come on! What are you waiting for?!” said Austin.

“I’m not going.” Said Anderson. “You saw those men back there, they need a leader.”

“Are you crazy?! You can’t stay here! This a fight we can’t win alone, not without help!” Austin objected.

“Exactly. We need the entire galaxy to unite together to stop the Reapers once and for all, not just to save Earth.” Said Anderson. “Go to the Citadel, talk to the Council, convince them to help you.”

“You know as well as I do that they won’t listen.” Said Austin.

“Then make them listen! Now go! That’s an order!” said Anderson.

“I don’t take orders from you, Anderson! I’m not in the Alliance anymore. Besides, you and I are the same rank now.” Austin objected.

“Shepard, please. I’m asking you as a friend.” Said Anderson.

Austin saw that there was no changing Anderson’s mind. And admittedly, he was right. All the soldiers here would definitely benefit from his leadership.

“We will return.” He said. “And when we do, we’ll bring back help. Good luck.”

“You too, Shepard.” Said Anderson.

“Joker, get us out of here.” Said Austin as he and the others went back inside the cargo bay as the doors sealed themselves.

So this was it. The day that Austin knew he wouldn’t be able to delay forever. After nearly 5 years, the Reaper war had finally begun...

POETRY

SET FREE

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

I don't want to be alive.
Why must everyone survive?
Death is the only escape,
When you're in this kind of shape.
Everyone wants for me to live,
But happiness they just can't give.
Loved ones that I hold dear,
Are the only reason I'm still here.
They don't know how my life is pain,
Everything they do is in vain.
They don't know what they're doing to me.
I just want to be set free.

A SLEEPY REFLECTION

Shashank Gopikrishna

I'm a part time musician [<http://www.reverbNation.com/shashankg>]. I write my own lyrics (simple as they are). But some are better left as poems. I think this is one such poem. I wrote this when I was looking back at my life and wondering about what kind of a person I was turning into. Expressing this, helped me change.

Tonight I sleep like a cradled child,
Frozen in ignorance;

Gliding along the tale of time
Not willing to look the other way.
Not questioning the comfort, nor doubting silence,
Yielding to the desire of day,
Submitting to indifference.

Tonight I sleep like a cradled child,
Painlessly selfish;

I fight not for a countryman,
I reek of fatal conceit.
Enslaved by worthless thought,
Endangered by innate deceit,
Uninhibitedly boorish.

Tonight I sleep like a cradled child,
To avoid concern, to avert distress;

Without the knowledge of identity,
I succeed in acknowledgement, for I am.
I know not what I would see tomorrow
I know not if I would see at all.
I stand thankful for presence.

Tonight I sleep like a cradled child,
Embracing the last morsel of innocence.

Tonight I sleep like a cradled child,

Finally to rest my sense.

HUNTING OF THE JOB

Kela Lewis-Morin
of <http://kelalewis-morin.deviantart.com/>

Cover Letter goes here:C.V after C.V.

Praying for kind words from referees.

Constant online submissions.

Bolstering my employable ammunition.

Researching and rewording.

Hoping they will label me as deserving.

In order to better my position.

Forcefully financing a high level of optimism.

Application after application.

Attempting to obtain any occupation.

Compromising my preferred industry.

Approaching each interview cynically.

Signing up to multiple agencies.

Open windows and tabs showcasing vacancies.

Checking my email inbox religiously.

Clicking and clinging to any given possibility.

IF GIVEN THE CHANCE

Fairygal11
of <http://Fairygal11.deviantart.com>

They say you need this and that,
Saying that you don't got what it takes,
Don't seem to appreciate what you got
As they turn you away.

Just a quick-side glance
Taking just one look
Without giving it a second try
They think your not worth a dime.

But if given the chance,
You'd show them what you got
What it takes to prove them wrong
To show that you got the stuff
That'll make them change their minds.

If given the chance
I'd impress them with my skills
Show them I got what it takes
To make the grade.

I may not be the smartest,
Don't have many experiences,
Maybe a beginner at the game,
But I got the right stuff.

Who cares what they say
You got what it takes
They think they need the best
What they need is the inspired.

What the world needs most is creativity
Original ideas that would make them shell-shocked,
Fresh blood to get the job done in the nick of time
Literature and art to inspire the newest generation.

If given the chance
We'd show them what were all about
Though we don't got much

Our greatest traits make up for it.
Loyalty, creativity, wit and nat,
They need people like us.

So just because we've been pushed away
Doesn't mean we should kick the bucket
We pick that bucket right up
Fill it with paint and create a masterpiece.

They say we can't do it
Patronize us if they like
It won't get us down
Just makes us stronger.

What doesn't kill you makes you stronger
If you got a quirk don't be ashamed
It makes you special and unique
Because extrodinary is what this world needs.

If we were given the chance
We show the world what we can do
Spread our wings and soar toward the sky
We'll fly higher than any before us.

If given the chance
We'd prove them wrong
Show them what we got
It's our time to shine.

If given the chance
We'd make this world better
With what we in our hearts
OOohhhh if given the chance...
If given the chance...