

Fanatical Publishing's

# Weekly Review

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## AND NOW, a word from the publisher:

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

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

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

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

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# Idiot Riot (Maybe)

## Special Side Story: BEAR PAY FOR VODKA

Justin Hillis

It was the year 201-\*cue space odyssey 2001 theme\*

Duuuu....Duuuuu....Daaaaaa....DA-DAH...ba-ba-ba-ba-bom-bom-bom-bom-bom...

I'm sorry, where was I? oh yes. It was that year above, and it came time to elect a new President of the USAP. The last president, a chimp named President Monkey, had been a huge success, though the idea of the banana smoothie becoming a national treasure caused many to scratch their heads.

And so we join our MIB ripoff round table. You wanna know what these guys look like? Hell, they're all wearing the same damn suit, and have their hair combed the exact same way. The only difference was they had name-tags. One spoke up after guzzling a hot, fresh pot of coffee. No, he drank from the pot, not a coffee cup.

His name was BILL.

“Hello everyone, my name is Bill.”

...it's BILL, you asshat.

“As you may have noticed, President Monkey's term is over...and we need a new president. Any suggestions?”

The suit next to him had a #1 on his suit. He was cutting up a salmon with a giant butcher knife. Suit #1 looked to his left at #2. #2 was snorting some cocaine. #2 coughed for a moment before looking at #3. #3 was quietly slurping beer from a beer hat. #3 looked at #4. #4 was reading a steamy romance, but quickly put it away after he noticed everyone looking at him. He looked at #5, who was playing solitaire. #5 stopped and looked at #6. #6 stopped smoking his dope for a few seconds and looked at #7. #7 paused his virtual porn, and took off his headphones before looking at #8. #8 stopped playing around on his U2-Pilot and looked at #9. #9 was reading the paper...and he had forgotten to put his pants on before coming to work. #9 looked at #10, who was in the middle of making plans for

the next super powered nuclear missile. #10 looked at #11, who was in the middle of making drum beats on the table with pencils. He then looked at BILL, before saying...

“I’ve got an idea.”

Shit, finally. Took the grand total of fifteen minutes. The Not-League of Unordinary Gentlemen, ladies and gents.

“Get me a plane to Russia.” #11 said.

“Da, comrade.” BILL stated.

“BILL, are you Russian by chance?”

“No, comrade. I am having good laugh, though. Comic is very funny.”

#11 raised his eyebrow and looked at him for a moment. “When the hell did we start talking about comics? If you’re talking about the newest issue of Hentai Nekomimi Robo-Meido, then you have to tell me where you found it.”

BILL slipped him a small piece of paper with an address. #11 looked at it, and nodded before leaving.

6 days later.

#11 set foot in Mother Russia, and immediately went to the main street of Main Street. It was there, amongst a strip mall of six vodka shops, he found what he was looking for.

What did he find? A big, burly Russian dancing bear, complete with little red hat and a frilly collar. The bear was sitting amongst a few bottles of vodka, and it’s tongue was hanging out the side of it’s mouth. #11 raised an eyebrow at this. He looked to the bear’s left; there was an old man dressed in a loin-cloth with a wolf pelt. He stank more of vodka than the bear, and had several teeth missing. He almost looked like he had a bird nesting in his beard

The Russian began to mumble before finally yelling, “BEAR PAY FOR VODKA! IS GOOD BEAR!” He then gave the bear a wad of money, and the bear lumbered off to the closest store, before coming out five minutes later with six bottles of vodka strung around

his neck.

#11 was astounded; this was exactly what he was looking for. He got as close to the old man as possible without passing out from the stench, and said, “I want to buy your bear.”

“BEAR PAY FOR VODKA! IS GOOD BEAR! I NO SELL.”

“Well, I have a plan for your bear, and it goes like this...” #11 began to whisper into the old man’s ear, and the old man thought he heard a chorus of angels singing as his eyes widened. The bear tilted his head at the two.

Within a day, they were on a plane back to the good ol’ USAP. It was on the plane that #11 explained his big plan for the bear: he was going to have him run for President. He figured, no one would want to run against a bear.

Boy, was he wrong.

As soon as they landed, #11 was informed that Bear had a mystery opponent. Bear roared; he was good to be having opponent.

Over the next few months, they groomed Bear to perfection, clothed him in a suit, and learned how to understand him. Then, they decided they needed to get a Vice President. They were gone to Canada for two days before coming back with a timber wolf, who they named Timbe R. Wolf. Together, they were unstoppable. And cuddly as all get out, once you got around the teeth and claws.

Three weeks later.

It was time to debut the #1 Presidential candidate to the public. The people and produce...and...other things...had been waiting for months to see Bear and Timbe R. Wolf. When they saw a bear and timber wolf in a suit, they all broke down and went, “Ooooh.”

Wrong “Aw” people. I don’t mean the A-w-e version.

“Awwwwww.”

That’s better.

Bear rose, to his podium, and patiently waited for his opponent. Suddenly, the words “I am Sashimi...Prince of the Sashimi...” came on the PA, and his opponent walked through the curtain. His opponent was...

SASHIMI, PRINCE OF THE SASHIMI!

Sashimi took his place at the podium, and started to address the crowd until he saw them all staring at him. One reporter raised their hand.

“What the hell do you want, you blathering fool?! Can’t you see that I, Sashimi...Prince of the Sashimi, have something I wish to say...?”

“Mr. Sashimi.”

“That is PRINCE of the Sashimi to you, you lowly worm.”

“Why did you use that ridiculous 30 track CD that proclaims your greatness for your entrance? Everyone’s sick of it by now.”

Sashimi’s eyes widened before stating, “How dare you insult my 30 track CD that proclaims my greatness! It took me a month to make that! Now sit down, you deplorable fool, or I shall smite you!”

He stared at everyone, to make sure no one else had anything to say. When he noticed that was the case, he unveiled a rolled up scroll, which, as he unrolled it, it went well into the audience. Where he got the scroll? Don’t ask me.

“This,” He stated, “Is my résumé. As you can see, I am more than qualified to be your president. If I am elected, I shall make the day of my election to be...” His eyes had a far-off look in them for a second, “...National Sashimi Day, Day of the Sashimi.”

One reporter edged his glasses up his nose before asking, “How long is this thing?”

“It is two hundred and fifty feet of accomplishments and wondrous feats by...” He paused to take in a deep breath through his nose. “...Sashimi, Prince of the Sashimi. Anyone who would insult such a scroll will be hit by my...Final...Flash.”

The reporters’ eyes all went wide for a moment before they all



shut up. No one wanted the Final Flash. Not even me.

While looking over said scroll of accomplishments, one reporter noted out loud, “Over half of these items have to do with Sashimi. Do you have any accomplishments that don’t have to do with yourself?”

Sashimi’s eyes widened. “How dare you! I am Sashimi, Prince of the Sashimi! All of my greatest feats in life deal with...me. Anything less would be unsatisfactory for me! I am the greatest being in the universe!”

It was then #6 walked over to Sashimi and whispered in his ear. Sashimi’s eyes went wide with shock as he yelled, with the mic right in front of him, “What do you mean I can’t run for President because I’m not from this planet?! That is an utter pile of bullshit! I should be allowed to rule, and I’ll show you why!”

He then moved away from the podium as he put a hand on his chest, and yelled, “Because I...am Sashimi...Pri-” only to be interrupted by agents #5,#6, and #9 each grabbing him under his arms and dragging him off stage. The whole time, he could be heard ranting about he was Sashimi, Prince of the Sashimi, and no one was allowed to handle him roughly.

The entire time Bear and Timbe R. Wolf had been sitting patiently, until Bear stood up at the podium. He roared. People gasped in shock. He roared again. People laughed. He then roared for twenty minutes. When he stopped, he looked at the crowd to see the reaction. People in the front row were crying at how beautiful his speech was, and before he knew it, everyone was standing up, and he received a standing ovation.

Timbe R. Wolf yawned before making some comments himself, and everyone went “Awww.”

It was then Bear threw both his paws up in the air, and declared the day he was elected to be FREE VODKA DAY. Also, fish all over the nation would be free. He received another standing ovation, until he noticed one person sitting down with their head in their hands.

He left the stage, and lumbered over to said sitting person. The entire audience was shocked and had no idea what Bear would do.

Bear stared at the man.

The man stared at Bear.

Bear knew this man; he had been Sashimi's campaign manager. Bear put a big paw on the man's shoulder and roared a few times. Within seconds, the man was crying and muttering out small thank yous to Bear. Bear embraced the man, and nearly broke all the man's ribs.

And so, it was declared that Bear would be President, with Timbe R. Wolf as his Vice President. Former President Monkey was even there to personally congratulate Bear. He was thanked and congratulated by all present...well, except for one guy.

It turned out one guy was going to stand up and object to the idea of a Bear for President, but as he was standing up to get out of his chair and forced to sit back down, he was shot in the head by #2, who used a sniper rifle. He was completely ignored as everyone congratulated Bear and Timbe R. Wolf.

And so, The USAP became totally wasted for one full day. Even Bear and Timbe R. Wolf. Oh, right. Beast was there too.

Hail to the Bear, for he is the President.

Hm? Oh, you wanna know what happened to Bear's Russian friend? He was given a job at the place called "The Golden Arches." Every now and then, he would randomly yell out "BEAR PAY FOR VODKA!" and "IS GOOD BEAR!" at customers while assisting them. However, he ended up being pulled from that job by #4, who bought him a suit, gave him some fake teeth to replace his missing ones, and gave him a spot on Bear's inner circle. It took like 6-7 baths to get rid of the vodka stench, though. Hm? You want to know why his friend was given a spot in Bear's inner circle?

Because Bear missed his friend. Cue an Aww moment.

Just remember this: Vote for Bear. Support Bear. Or an anonymous agent will shoot you in the head. Bwahahaha!

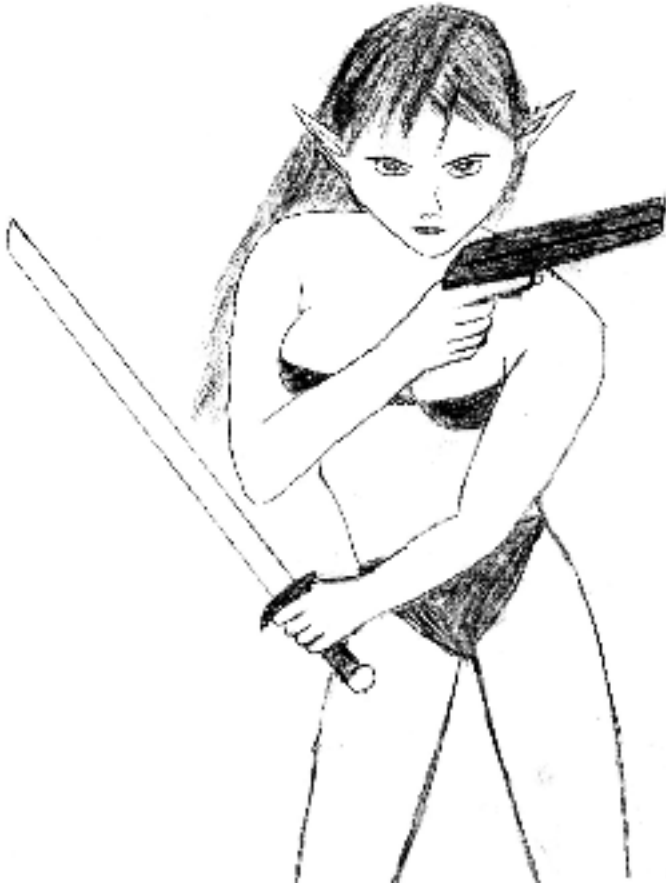
Bear rules. Just sayin'.

Oh? We have a personal comment from Bear.

Bear roared and raised one paw in the air. He looked plastered.

Awww.

# FAN FICTION



## or: Leanna's Return

Brought to you courtesy of Gunslinger, the wandering Vigilante.

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

Warning: May contain adult content

## ME2 HELLDIVER SAGA CHAPTER 30: ALPHA FIGHTS BACK

Veyron722skyhook  
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Steam filled the room as Austin relaxed. The Helldiver had recently discovered that apparently his cabin seemed to have a bath tub as well as a shower. Unable to resist the thought of a steaming hot bath, he'd instantly run it and was now relaxing peacefully. All around him in the separate room was several scented candles which added to the atmosphere. Austin had also dimmed the lights so that only the candles provided any illumination.

The Helldiver was so relaxed, that he didn't even notice the door open and a figure stepped in. Despite this though, Austin was able to hear the figure. He didn't worry at all. After all, he knew who it was. The Helldiver smiled even more as he heard the sound of clothing being removed.

Within a few seconds, he felt two soft hands start to massage his shoulders. He opened his eyes and looked up, straight into the eyes of a naked Liara.

"Enjoying yourself?" she smiled.

"Now that you're here, I am." Austin smiled back as he and Liara kissed.

The Asari surprisingly seemed to pull back a bit, rubbing her lips a bit.

"You... need a shave, my love." she said, almost order like.

"Do I?" Austin asked teasingly as he moved one his hands up to his face and felt it.

She was right, his face was starting to feel a bit bristly and he was developing a stubble.

"Oh, you're right. I do." he said.

Austin reached for some shaving foam and his razor, as he went to apply the foam however, Liara grabbed both his wrists.

"May I?" she asked naughtily.

Austin simply nodded and put the foam in her hands. The Asari then started rubbing it all over his jawline. It was actually quite relaxing to have someone else do it for him. Having Liara do it, was even better. Her smooth and delicate touch made him sigh in bliss. After a few seconds, she stopped.

Austin then heard the sound of water rippling. He opened his eyes to see Liara climbing into the bath. As she sat down, her tits seemed to float slightly. It was a very exotic sight. Austin couldn't help but chuckle slightly at this, and even Liara found it a bit funny.

"So, shall I?" Liara asked as she took the razor in her hand and moved in front of her bond mate, her large breasts jiggled slightly as the water rippled around them. Austin did his best to stay focused and not get aroused by her wet skin.

"Are you sure about this?" he asked hesitantly.

"Aw, don't you trust me?" Liara asked innocently.

"I do. It's just that you've never done this before." Austin replied.

"I've seen enough of your memories to know how to do this right. I promise you, I'm not gonna give you another scar. If I do, well you can punish me... any way you like." said Liara. As she said the last bit, her free hand reached into the water and gave Austin's currently flaccid, but very warm and relaxed, member a stroke, causing him to jump slightly at the sudden touch.

"Fair enough, alright." he smiled as he hugged Liara closer to him, squashing her breasts against his chest.

"Hold still then." Liara smiled, and she slowly moved the razor across his face.

Austin laid back and relaxed as Liara made several strokes across his face. She took it slowly and gently so as to not cause any cuts by accident. After a few minutes, she finally finished and moved back slightly to inspect her work.

"Well, how did I do?" she asked as she took a small mirror from the side of the bath and held it up in front of Austin's face.

The Helldiver moved his face from side to side as he inspected it in the mirror. There were no mark, missed bits of hair or anything, and it was super smooth. Liara had done an absolutely flawless job. Not even he himself had done this well.

"Perfect. Simply perfect. I dare say I've never seen better." he said.

Liara smiled and moved up close to her boyfriend again and kissed him deeply. As the two hugged each other close, Austin rather sneakily slid both his hands down her body all the way to her ass. The Asari jumped slightly in surprise when Austin grabbed both her cheeks rather tightly.

"Hmm, still smoother." he said slyly.

"I thought the term was used for babies." Liara smiled, obviously getting what he meant by that.

"Yeah, but I don't think yours has lost any smoothness at all." Austin smiled.

"You do know how to flatter me, don't you." said Liara

"Of course I do. I love you." said Austin as he kissed the Asari on the cheek.

"I love you too."

Liara then pushed Austin right up against the edge.

"This actually feels very familiar. You remember how we first made love?" Liara asked, remembering when they had swam together on the Citadel over three years ago. That had indeed been when they first had sex.

"How could I forget?" Austin smiled.

"This feels a lot like we're doing it again, only more romantic." said Liara as she planted a few kisses on her bond mate's neck.

"Oh, but it gets better." Austin smiled slyly as he pressed a button on the edge of the bath.

There was a low hum and then suddenly the whole surface of the water became distorted by bubbles. It was a Jacuzzi, as well as a bath.

"Ooooh! That feels so good!" Liara sighed.

"I knew you'd like that." said Austin.

"Make love to me, Austin. Please..." Liara nearly begged as she reached down and grabbed his penis very tightly, causing him to start getting hard.

"Alright then, my blue goddess." said Austin, slightly surprised by Liara's forwardness, but pleasantly so.

As the two once again started kissing, this time way more passionately, Austin reached for a small remote near the bath, pointed it at the door and pressed the a button. The door closed itself, leaving just him, Liara, and a warm Jacuzzi that would very soon be full of love making.

"Major, this is urgent."

The Arkane council stood before Austin, who was already decked out in his armour since he and Alpha Squad had been just about to do a training exercise in the simulator.

"I'm all ears, councillors." he said.

"Another colony has been attacked. This time however, it's not the Collectors." said Tarnack.

"What do you mean?"

"It seems the Batarians have suddenly decided to try and take advantage. A small band of slavers have invaded the colony of Terra Nova." Spartan explained.

"Normally, we would send a different squad in your place, but this time we feel it best we send you. After all, you have a lot of experience, and you personally know one of them from Elysium." said Tarnack.

"Balak?!" said Austin in surprise.

He knew obviously that the Batarian terrorist had escaped from Helldiver custody about a year or so ago after he'd been captured on



the asteroid over Terra Nova, but he hadn't expected that Balak would show this face again this soon, let alone in an attack like this.

Spartan nodded.

"If at all possible, we'd very much like to see him back behind bars." he said.

"We'll head straight there." said Austin.

"Rescuing the colonists is your top priority, Shepard. If however there's a chance you can recapture Balak..." said Tarnack.

"We'll all bear that in mind, Councillors. Shepard out."

It was no coincidence that Balak had attacked Terra Nova. He had tried to destroy the exact same colony over three years ago. Naturally of course, that attack had been foiled by Austin. Austin did have to admit though that he was interested in seeing the look on Balak's face when he saw the Helldiver alive and well again. News of his return still wasn't public knowledge, even if some people had seen him in person.

All of Alpha were packed into the Hellhound dropship. Although they had to cancel their training exercise, they were still in high spirits. They encountered the Collectors so many times that they were almost happy to be returning to fighting a more familiar enemy. An enemy that their exosuits had first been created for and they'd been trained to fight in the first place.

"Are we parking?" Griffin asked as he felt the Hellhound shudder.

"Indeed we are. They're right below us." Said Austin as he stood up, keeping one his hands on the ceiling railings for support.

"How far below?"

"Do you really wanna know?"

"Probably not. Do I wanna know?"

"70,000 feet." Austin replied.

"That's high." Said Griffin.

He then noticed that Sandra, who was sat next to him, looked a bit pale. She looked as though she was going to be sick.

"You alright?" he asked concernedly.

"She gets a bit air sick from time to time. Not very often, but it does happen." Alaara replied as she patted her wife reassuringly on the back.

"Yeah. So fair warning, I might throw up on you." Sandra groaned.

Although Griffin knew he shouldn't he did nudge himself away from Sandra ever so slightly.

"What's the plan than, Shepard?" Ventra asked as he checked that all the new gadgets on his bow worked correctly.

"Well, we know they're ready for us. I figure they have defences pointed in every direction, except..." said Austin.

"Except they're not looking straight up." Said Kraan.

"Dive bomb and jump?" Dash asked, excitedly.

"Oh no. No, my stomach can't take that." Said Sandra groggily.

"You'll be fine, darling. Just keep picturing me naked. That should help." Said Alaara.

"Yeah, I don't really know how to do that under stress." Said Sandra as she took several deep breaths. She always removed her helmet when she was like this, it did help a very small bit since she no longer felt concealed.

"I do." Said Alaara as she touched Sandra's head and her eyes went black.

"Ah, much better." Sandra sighed dreamily as an image of a fully nude Alaara came into her mind.

"Anyway, if we did a dive bomb, our engines would register on their thermals." Said Austin.

"Hmm, what if we tried something else?" said Leena.

Everyone, except for Griffin, Liara, and Garrus knew what she meant.

"How did I know you were gonna say that?" Austin sighed. He then turned to the others. "Everyone, you might wanna tighten your harnesses up."

"Oh no!" said Sandra as Alaara lowered her harness over her. Everyone else did the same for themselves.

"Breathe slowly, love." Said the Asari calmly as the drop ship started to shudder even more as its engines cut out and it began its decent

"Then stop projecting an image of us having sex into my mind!" Sandra yelled.

"Sorry. Got a bit carried away." Said Alaara.

The drop continued for several long seconds with Austin monitoring the altitude.

"Prepare to fire engines on my mark." He said. "5... 4... 3... 2... 1..."

The Hellhound gave a massive lurch as the thrusters fired and their decent stopped.

"Alright, everyone out! Go! Go! Go!" Austin yelled as the doors opened and everyone jumped.

"Let's move it people!" Alaara yelled as she and Sandra jumped.

"Yeah, let's move." Said Dash as pushed himself off the wall to give himself more running speed.

The sheer force of all the Helldivers landing at once shook at least 5 of the Batarians in their area.

Guns blazed as each Helldiver ran to suitable cover in order to better survey their environments.

They quickly saw that the Batarians where slightly better equipped than Alpha Squad had originally thought. They had surprisingly good weapons, better armour and even a few small rovers with mounted guns, one of which fired at them, causing the squad to split up.

Dash was quick to dodge the shot and he ran at the rover. It fired

several more rounds at him, but his enhanced speed made him too fast. The Helldiver scout jumped up onto the bonnet and continued running. He then jumped again, and soon he was up on a balcony of the main building the Batarians were guarding.

"Kraan, stay behind me!" Alaara yelled as she and the Krogan took cover behind one of the many cargo crates around the colony in order to avoid fire from the other rover.

"Go! Go!" she yelled.

"Griffin, move up!" Leena yelled as she and the demolition expert bolted out from behind another crate.

"On it!"

The second they came out however, the rover that had previously been firing on Dash shifted its attention to them. It fired a shot which impacted very close to the both of them. Leena was unaffected by it, but Griffin was smashed against the crate by the force of the blast.

"Fuck grenades." Leena swore as she continued running. The rover fired another shot, but she managed to roll away from it.

The two rovers then accelerated and attempted to surround Leena, but the Quarian had anticipated this. She quickly activated her omni tool and brought her hand against the ground very hard as she remained crouched from her roll.

The EMP burst from her hand immediately brought both rovers to a halt and the drivers were forced to abandon them. Right as they did however, Austin was quick to gun them both down with his Revenant.

"Clear! Move up!" he yelled.

The rest of Alpha Squad followed and they began advancing on the main building.

Dash had taken the high ground so that he had the squad covered. There were more Batarian on the roof which he was quick to fire on. However, his dual pistols weren't really much good and their suppressing fire soon had him pinned behind cover.

"We've gotta time this just right! Wait for my mark!" said Alaara.

She and Kraan, along with the others, had caught up and had the Batarians in their sights.

"Call it, T'onrak." said the Krogan.

From on the roof, another Batarian joined the other snipers. This one however was different. He had a very dark red set of armour on that was fitted with spikes in certain places. Austin knew this wasn't Balak, but that sort of armour looked familiar.

"Okay, what have you got for me?" said the Batarian he drew a sniper from his back and started scanning for a target.

"Alright, boys. Me first." said Liara as she took a grenade from her belt and threw it.

Only a few seconds after it left the Asari's hand however, it exploded as the Batarian sniper shot it in mid-air. Alaara and Kraan however, took this as the signal and came out of cover to attack.

"NOW! No wait, not now, not now!" said Alaara quickly as she pulled Kraan back into cover to avoid the incoming fire from another rover.

"Come on." Kraan groaned.

"Dammit!" Liara swore as she retreated back into cover next to Austin.

"Ventra, we're pinned down. I need you to take them out!" said Dash into his comm.

Said Turian was also pinned behind a much smaller cargo crate next to Leena was blind firing a few shots from her shotgun.

"I'm on it." he replied.

Ventra reached behind his back and unclipped his newly upgraded bow. It was very different now from the last time he had used it. Recently, the Turian had spent a few late nights tinkering around with his weapon of choice. He'd also been spending a bit of time with Dell who had helped him with some of the many new upgrades he'd made. Now instead of it being a traditional bow that had been used for hundreds of years, it was a highly advanced bow outfitted with some of the latest technology best suited for hunting and combat.

Ventra had managed to eliminate the need for the quiver of arrows on

his back by outfitting an automatic reload system into the bow in the form of a small box attachment which now carried some brand new telescopic arrows that Dell had designed. The tips could easily be changed inside and outside the box and could also still be detached if Ventra needed to use one of the arrows as a melee weapon, as he did tend to do in close up combat.

The two ends of the bow now had a small wheel on each end which allowed better pull backs of the string and the bow to have even more force when firing an arrow. Dell had also fitted a PS energy support hydraulic system to allow the two light ends of the bow, which needed to bend in order for the bow to be pulled back, so that they would move in accordance with the string.

Ventra himself had also fitted a long range laser do for better targeting and he had also redesigned the bows body from scratch, not just to improve lightness and looks, but also so that it could now collapse and fold up for easy carrying and so that he could now carry it even more easily on his back. Overall, it now looked like a bow out of this century, rather than a traditional old fashioned one.

"Don't let me down now, baby." he said as his thumb pressed the small button which opened up the reload system and an arrow flipped out. It instantly settled itself onto the slot where the arrows where fired from, and the end of it extend until it had attached itself onto the main string.

Ventra took a deep breath as he wrapped both his two fingers around the string with the arrow in-between and he drew it back. He then very slowly and calm pointed it upwards.

"They say the best offense, is a good DEFENCE!"

He let the string fly and the arrow shot up into the air and very high speed. It gradually slowed and then started plummeting down. The tip went bang on target into the ground next to the feet of the Batarians. Instantly, a large shield formed itself around them.

"What the... hold your fire! Stand down." the sniper ordered.

"Heh. I got this." said one of the Batarians as he pulled out his pistol and pointed it at the shield.

"No, wait!"

The Batarian fired and the shot simply bounced right back, going straight through his helmet and killing him instantly. The shot continued bouncing and did the same to all the others. The whole of the inside of the shield became covered in Batarian blood as the shot went through each one several times before they all fell and the it finally disappeared, leaving several torn apart bodies.

"Did I get 'em?" Ventra asked.

"You got 'em alright." Dash said, rather impressed by what he'd seen.

"Nice shot, Robin Hood." Said Sandra.

"I'll never hear the end of that, will I?" Ventra sighed, but he said it in a happy way. He knew his team mates meant that is a compliment.

"High ground's clear. Griffin, you guys can handle this from here right?"

"Think so." Griffin replied.

Right as the demolition expert finished speaking however, several shots hit the wall next to him. More and more Batarians had come out of the man building, all of them concentrating on Alpha Squad.

On the plus side however, they could at least now get all the colonists out and away from the settlement.

All of the squad except for Austin, Leena and Ventra had headed to where the Batarians had been keeping the colonists. Though it was clear now, the colonists would still be in danger from incoming fire and the slavers were making a push.

"We need time to evacuate the colonists. They're fish in a barrel without us." Said Austin.

"We got this. It's good. Go." Said Leena.

"Do you think you two can hold them off?" Austin asked.

Ventra turned to the Major, grinning under his helmet.

"Major..." he pressed one of the buttons on the handle of his bow and another arrow automatically flipped out of the box, this time with a different tip. "It would be my genuine pleasure."

The Turian then popped out of cover, drew the string back and fired an arrow which impacted right into the head of one of the Batarians. The arrows tip even shot a small circle of bullets which killed a few more others which had been standing near.

Leena also stood up and started firing with her shotgun while her plasma cannon was set on automatic and was targeting and firing for her.

Austin meanwhile ran to join the others as they worked on getting the colonists out.

"Everyone keep moving! Don't stop." He said as he and the others laid down suppressing fire.

"Just like Palaven all over again." said Leena as she fired several more rounds, Ventra made sure to cover his girlfriend with arrow fire when she needed to reload her shotgun.

"You and I remember Palaven very differently, Leena." said Ventra as he fired two more arrows.

The Turian was quick to react though. He swung his bow at the Batarian's legs causing him to trip up. At the same time, he took the already set arrow from the bow in his free hand. As the Batarian fell on his back, Ventra twirled it a few times before he then plunged the tip right into his enemy's heart.

Though the arrows were primarily meant for shooting, they could still function as melee weapons when it came to close combat, as did the two blades that Ventra had fitted to his bow.

Leena meanwhile was on another Batarian's back and was wrestling with him. She both her omni tools set to electrify anyone that she touched. Like her boyfriend's arrows, these were handy weapons in close combat. Of course Leena's favourite melee weapon of choice was her Tomahawk and combat knife which she used at the same time. When the Quarian had first joined Alpha squad she'd only used the Tomahawk, but Ventra had slowly taught her how to use a knife as well which she was eventually able to at the same time.

Despite Leena's best efforts though; the Batarian she was attempting to stun wasn't going down. He was just too durable.

"Shoot him... please!" she called as her attacker tried to throw her off.



Ventra quickly reacted and fired an arrow straight into the Batarian's forehead. The alien's visor smashed as it went straight through.

Another Batarian suddenly charged Ventra and tackled him to the floor. Ventra was quick to return attack though as he used another arrow as a melee weapon and stabbed it into the Batarian.

Leena meanwhile hopped off of the now limp Batarian. Two more ran at her from either side, but she was ready for them. As the one on the left attempted to melee her with the butt of his rifle, the Quarian unsheathed her combat knife in her left hand and blocked the attack as she held it backhand. Her right hand then unsheathed her tomahawk which she used to trip her attacker. As the Batarian hit the floor, she brought the Tomahawk right down on his head, smashing right through his helmet and into his brain.

Leena then turned back to other one that had been running at her to see that another had joined him. No matter though, she could still take them.

As the first Batarian lunged at her, she parried his gun with her tomahawk and pushed him away, causing him to lose his balance and topple onto his back. The other Batarian then came close, but Leena simply embedded her tomahawk in his left shoulder, stunning him from the pain.

The other Batarian meanwhile that Leena had just thrown to the floor had managed to roll onto his back and had pointed his gun right at her. The Quarian quickly brought her still stunned opponent right on front of her and used him as a shield as the downed Batarian fired. The shot hit the other Batarian square in the chest and he dies instantly. Leena then seized her chance. She threw the now dead Batarian shield out of the way and jumped onto the downed one. Right as she landed on top of him, she sank her tomahawk into him.

All the while, Ventra shot two more Batarians as they kept coming. Leena resorted to laying down cover fire with her plasma cannon. Another Batarian swung at Ventra, but he was too slow. The Turian skidded under the Batarian. As he slowed down, he got back up, whirled around and shot the Batarian clean in the back.

More Batarians came, but then several rounds tore one apart. Both Helldivers looked to see that Griffin had joined the fray.

"Nice of you to join us, Griff." Said Leena as she pinned another Batarian's gun down with her tomahawk and slashed his neck.

"Not about to let you have all the fun." Said Griffin as he punched and knocked several other Batarians down with his gauntlet and minigun.

They finally finished the last, and the area seemed clear.

"All civilians evacuated." came Austin's voice.

"We done here then?" Ventra asked as he set about gathering back what arrows he could. He only had so many he could use, it was use to reuse them as much as possible.

"Not quite. Our secondary objective is to capture Balak if we can." Austin replied.

"How did I know he was going to say that?" said Leena.

A sudden punch from behind sent Leena flying. Griffin looked to see a heavy Batarian standing right behind him, dressed in the same red armour that the sniper had been in. Were these guys like an elite squad or something?

The red Batarian punched Griffin as well before he could react in time and he landed next to Leena.

"You alright?" he groaned as he got back up.

"Bought the same as you." Leena replied as she too jumped back onto her feet.

"That bad, huh?"

The red heavy Batarian had now whipped out a rocket launcher which he instantly fired. The explosion caused both of them to fall again, but this time Leena fired an EMP blast from her shoulder cannon which disabled the launcher.

As Griffin got up again however, he failed to notice another rover which was now heading in his direction.

"Uh-oh! Car!" he yelled as he ran to avoid getting run over.

"Bosh'tet!" Leena swore.

Right as she turned back to the Batarian heavy, he swiped her shotgun out of her hand. The Batarian then charged straight into her, knocking the Quarian to the floor.

Before he could deliver another blow however, Dash, who was still up on the high ground, fired at him forcing him into cover. The Helldiver scout then noticed the rover chasing Griffin.

"Oh fuck, no you don't!" said Dash as he jumped and kicked the rover's gunner as he landed.

Right as Dash went to deliver another blow however, the Batarian kicked him off. The two started to fight one another as Dash was forced to holster his pistols.

All the while, Leena had managed to get back on her feet and ran to pick her shotgun back up. The heavy Batarian however got in her way and she resorted to hand to hand combat with him. Despite that she managed to retrieve her shotgun during the fight however, the rover, which still had a driver, suddenly did a power slide and knocked her right into a nearby crate.

"Ow! My helmet!"

At the same time, Austin had been behind cover observing the battle. He could already tell that things were starting to get out of hand.

"Okay, time to fight fire... with fire!" he said as he took a homing beacon from his belt and threw it.

There were a few quick beeps, and then a large container of some sort landed on the ground. Some of the Batarian's backed away cautiously. The front of the container flew off and a large robot stepped out.

"Who's ready to rumble?!" said X-5 as he smashed both his fists together.

The Batarians raised their guns at him.

"I thought so."

Another rover then appeared and made straight for X-5 as it attempted to run the robot over. X-5 quickly grabbed the bumper and pushed. The rover's tires skidded as it tried to push against the strong

robot. At first, he did appear to be only just holding the rover back, but then the blue hologram which served as X-5's eye changed to a bright red.

"Combat protocols online. X-5, smash!" he said in a now extremely deep voice which sounded completely different to his own.

Sure enough, X-5 gave the rover a violent push, ripping the bumper off the front in his hands as the vehicle was on only its back wheels for a moment. As it came down, the robot then kicked the rover and it was sent flying, forcing several of the Batarians to jump out of the way.

"Well, well. The Red Skulls. What a pleasure to see you again." said Alaara as she stood over another one of the red Batarians, recognising the symbol on the armour.

The Red Skulls were a special group of Batarians. Each one of them wore a suit of red armour that had been extensively modified. A few years or so ago, the Batarians had attempted to copy Helldiver technology so that they perhaps stood a better chance against their enemy.

Resources for the Batarians however were scarce, not to mention that it was impossible for them to get any Helldiver tech to reverse engineer since Helldiver armour always vaporized itself when its user died.

Capturing Helldivers as prisoners never worked either as the armour could never be removed by hand and they had all sorts of defence mechanisms, the lockdown being the most hated.

Despite this though, the Batarian had eventually managed to make some armour that could in some way compete with a Helldiver. Although this had worried many Helldivers at first, those who had encountered them simply said that compared to their technology, the Batarian versions were nothing but cheap knock offs. In some ways, they were right. The Red Skulls, named mostly due to the colour of their armour, in truth only had enhanced strength and not many of the other features that Helldivers had. The suits were indeed cheap knock offs.

However, what the Red Skulls lacked in technology, they gained in their advanced training. Unlike the suits, their training did actually help them. It very easily rivalled that of a Helldiver's and enabled the Red Skulls to compete with the Helldivers not just on a physical level,

but also a mental level as well.

Even Alpha Squad often broke out a sweat against them since they fought so well. Last time they had met however, Austin had managed to kill their leader which had forced them to retreat; hence they hadn't been seen in a long time.

Alaara was suddenly interrupted however when another Batarian threw a biotic push at her and she was sent flying. Right as she aimed to fire however, a knife suddenly embedded itself in her rifle causing it to short circuit.

"Pleasure's all mine, bitch!" said the Batarian whom she'd just had her rifle trained on, who surprisingly seemed to be female.

She brandished two more knives in her hands and spun as she lunged at Alaara. The Asari narrowly dodged the attack as she used her biotics to push herself away. She then threw the now useless assault rifle at her attacker, which was instantly slashed apart by the knives as it hit the female Batarian. The female lunged again, but Alaara delivered several hard and fast strikes that knocked her away. The other one that had attacked her earlier attempted a punch at her, but the Asari parried the punches and back flipped. The two Batarians ran after her.

The Heavy Batarian meanwhile had just got up after the rover had knocked him down. As his vision cleared however, he found a big shadow standing over him.

"God's certainly not smiling on you today, pal. Seems your judgement day's come early." Said Griffin as he cracked his knuckles.

The Heavy swung a punch at him, but the Helldiver easily caught it in his right hand and slowly twisted it to the side, forcing the Batarian onto his knees. Griffin had done a lot of working out since his last fight with Batarian slavers and as a result he'd been able to increase his strength and muscles just a bit more.

Griffin then brought his massive left gauntlet back, clenched it into a fist and swung. The force of the punch was so hard that it hit like a ton of bricks and the Batarian's helmet, which still had a head inside it, was smashed clean off. The decapitated body fell to the ground, leaking blood.

"You're dead, that's good, Amen." Said Griffin very quickly as he

made a cross with his hands.

The demolition expert then looked up to see Alaara still fighting the two Batarians, this time up on the roofs.

The female Batarian once again swung at her, but the Asari used her biotics to propel herself up into the air and back flipped over her two attackers. The female attacked again, but this time Alaara managed to block the attacks and struck back with a few of her own. Alaara then gave a very sharp punch which sent the female Batarian back again.

The other one however quickly took her place and now Alaara was in a fist fight with him too. The Asari dodged his strikes before she managed to jump, and midway through delivered a sharp kick to his chest.

Alaara back flipped from her kick and landed back on her feet. Seeing that both her opponents were still standing, she reached behind her back and took out her own melee weapon, a telescopic electrified stun stick. With this, the Captain was now able to deliver better strikes and she could now block even better than using her fists.

Using the stun stick was pretty much the same basic principle as using a sword. Austin had even taught Alaara a few good tricks to use with her weapon.

As Alaara clashed with the female Batarian, she kicked the other one in the head so that he was knocked away from the main fight. At the same time, X-5 had now joined the fight. The robot caught the male Batarian as he staggered away from Alaara.

X-5 picked up the Batarian and flung him over his head. He then slammed his enemy down hard, causing even more disorientation.

"The hell with you!" the Batarian growled as he slowly got back up.

X-5 charged. But this time, the Batarian was ready for him. He swung his arm downwards and also moved to the side quickly to avoid the robot's running swing. The strike tripped X-5 up and sent him flying.

At the same time, the female Batarian that was duelling Alaara had noticed this and used it to her advantage. She forced Alaara back with a push, getting the Asari Helldiver in just the right place.

Alaara noticed only too late that X-5 was flying right at her. The robot crashed into her and she was knocked back. Right as the two hit the floor however, they almost instantly got back up. Alaara was back on her feet right away and she ran at the female Batarian.

X-5 meanwhile skidded as he slowed himself down. He then did a combat roll forward and fired a projectile from his shoulder mounted rail gun. The large round zoomed towards the Batarian at high speed. Rather surprisingly though, he threw up a biotic shield and the round bounced off. It zoomed back towards X-5 and impacted at his feet.

For a moment, a large amount of smoke engulfed the robot and he was hidden from view. It seemed as though the Batarian had prevailed, but his joy was short lived as X-5 fired another round which hit the Batarian square in the chest and he was sent flying all the way into the water overhead. Even a Batarian wouldn't survive that.

Alaara and the female Batarian meanwhile were clashing back and forth, knife on stun stick. While Austin's sword skills used more of his fencing training, Alaara's was more martial arts based.

They swung; they kicked, and parried each other's attacks. A sudden accidental miss allowed the Batarian an opening and she kicked Alaara hard in the face forcing her back.

That however only made the Asari angry. As the female Batarian once again attacked, this time Alaara allowed her rage to fuel her attacks and strikes. She then attacked so fast that she then kicked the Batarian so hard that her helmet was smashed off. She slid along the floor and narrowly managed to grab the edge before she fell.

The female Batarian groaned as she slowly tried to pull herself up. Before she could however, a large metal hand suddenly grabbed her and hoisted her up.

"Fuck." She swore as she found herself staring into the skull painted mask of Griffin, his massive left gauntlet holding her tightly.

"May God have mercy on your soul, slaver." He said coldly. He then let go.

The female Batarian screamed as she felt the metal grip loosen and she fell. Her vision went dark as she felt her neck hit something hard, and then nothing.

Things weren't going well. So far, Balak had lost almost all his men and these attackers, whoever they were, we're closing in. Walking alongside him was another Batarian soldier. Not long after Balak had just managed to escape from Arkadia, he had assumed control of the Red Skulls. They had long been disorganised and leaderless ever since Alpha Squad had killed their last one a few years ago.

Behind the two were also two more Red Skull heavies, both carrying large miniguns. They were inside the large loading bay of the colony's main building. Overhead was a massive crane constantly moving different cargo crates from one place to another. Balak suddenly stopped and held his hand up for the others to stop. The soldier instantly pulled his assault rifle from his back and held it up in case they were suddenly attacked.

"We've got company. Cut 'em down!" Balak ordered.

The two heavies obeyed and both fired their miniguns in synch in an attempt to try and force any hidden enemies out of cover and into the open. After a few seconds, they ceased fire.

"Hold this position." said Balak.

A Turian Helldiver then suddenly appeared from out of cover wielding a bow and arrow. He fired two arrows, both of which hit the heavies but did hardly any damage. The two brutes where quick to return fire with their miniguns.

Ventra quickly rolled to the over pillar and retreated into cover from the incoming fire. Leena and Griffin, who had been accompanying him, did the same.

"Helldivers! Pull 'em down!" Balak ordered as he and the soldier left. The heavies remained where they were, still firing without pause.

"Well, we'll see about that." said Leena as she held her tomahawk up in a throw stance "Catch!"

The Quarian threw the weapon and it flew towards the Batarians, spinning like a boomerang. Unfortunately however, that proved to be a disadvantage since it missed the Batarian's head, did a slingshot around them, missed again and it flew right back at its master... embedding itself straight in her chest plate.

"LEENA!"



"Crap! That didn't go so well." Said Griffin as he crouched down to check on the Quarian. He could still sense a heartbeat.

"She's alright. Her suit took the blow, no breaches. She's down, but not out." he said.

Ventra relaxed a bit at this. At least he knew his girlfriend was still alive.

The constant barrage of minigun fire continued. After a few painfully long seconds though, the rest of Alpha Squad eventually showed up. Ventra was the first to notice them.

"About time you guys got here. We're pinned." He said.

"We miss all the fun?" Dash asked as he and the others took cover.

"Hardly." Ventra replied.

"Okay, here's what we're gonna do..." said Austin.

Right before he speak his plan however, Liara ran straight past him, jumped over the two guards and made into the main part of the complex unscathed.

"Hmm, didn't think of that one." said Austin "Cover me!"

The Major then ran out of cover straight into the line of fire.

"Cover me? That's the plan?!" said Kraan.

"Huh, when are those two gonna get married?" Alaara couldn't help but chuckle as she watched Austin perform the exact same move as Liara and he managed to get past the guards.

"My money's on them getting married during a fight. That'd be pretty cool." said Dash.

"I'd rather not make any bets on something like that." said Griffin.  
"Love makes its own path."

"Oh come on! A hundred credits! Put it towards a lap dance with Miss Lawson, how about that?" said Dash.

Austin quickly caught up with Liara. She was crouched on one side of a locked door.

"That was a bit of a reckless move for you, Liara." said Austin in a somewhat surprised tone as he took up defensive position on the other side.

"Always the element of surprise." said Liara.

"You don't say."

"Careful. That room's guarded by turrets." the Asari advised.

"Think we can get past them?" Austin asked.

"Not by ourselves, and I think the others are... occupied." said Liara.

"Hmm. Anyone? We need you to get the power." said Austin into his comlink.

"We're a little busy here." Alaara replied.

For a moment, it seemed as though they had little options. But then, an unexpected voice suddenly replied through the radio.

"This is Leena. I copy."

"I'll be damned, she came round." said Austin in surprise. Leena had always been tough, but still... for her to get up so quickly from something like that was very impressive.

"Good show, girl. That's the spirit. Still have a bit of fight in you." Said Ventra.

Leena slowly got back on her feet. She then reached for her Tomahawk and yanked it out of her chest hard. There was no sign of blood or any suit breach, the Quarian's armour was too tough for that. It was fair to say that while Tali had the brains, Leena was the better fighter. She'd had over ten years of working with Alpha Squad to learn much and her own personal reasons for becoming a Helldiver had made her battle hardened.

Leena twirled her Tomahawk between her fingers for a few seconds before she then brought her hand back and once again threw her Tomahawk. This time however, it didn't miss. The small axe flew

directly at its target and embedded itself in the shoulder of one of the heavies. Despite this however, it didn't seem to injure him and he just kept firing.

"So much for that plan." said Kraan.

"Didn't realise they were that tough." said Leena. There was a hint of anger in the Quarian's voice. Most likely, this whole thing was starting to piss her off.

"What now?" Dash asked.

Leena simply remained calm and silent as she pumped another round into her shotgun. She then slowly walked towards cover to properly observe the two heavies.

She waited a few brief seconds before she then jumped out of cover and flipped over the incoming minigun fire, firing a grenade from her shotgun's grenade launcher attachment. The shot hit the ground near the heavy's feet which disoriented them. This briefly caused them both to stop firing and Leena seized her chance.

The Quarian ran, firing more shots as she did. Despite this however, the two heavies were quick to recover from the first grenade and they resumed their minigun fire, which shot all the grenades that the Quarian had just fired causing them all to explode before they hit their targets.

Leena quickly retreated back into cover. The Quarian looked out slightly to try and see if there was anything she could try. She then noticed the massive crane. Leena aimed her shotgun at it and fired at least three grenades at it. As each one hit the massive crane, it very slowly started to malfunction and began swivelling to the side.

Only too late did the two Batarian heavies notice this and they failed to move in time. The large crane crashed right into them and crushed them both as it finally hit the other side of the cargo area.

"Huh, I don't believe it." said Griffin in surprise.

"You go, girl!" said Ventra as he gave Leena a friendly nudge.

"Stop calling me girl." said Leena.

"We're all clear, Shepard. It'll be dark in less than sixty." Austin

heard Leena say.

"Balak's in that room. He's got someone else with him." said Liara.

"Then we do this by the book. Nice and carefully." Said Austin.

The lights suddenly went out and only the emergency lighting was now on.

"Damn it." Balak cursed.

"We need to go!" said the soldier urgently.

"I already told you, I'm not leaving the others!" said Balak as activated his omni blade.

"Most of them are already dead! Besides, if we leave, they have no reason to be here! We don't have much time." said the soldier.

"Actually, you don't have any time." said Austin as he and Liara suddenly deactivated their cloaks and materialised out of nowhere, guns at the ready.

"Shepard?!" said Balak and shock as he saw his old foe.

"Surprised to see me, Balak?" Austin asked, mockingly.

"You're supposed to be dead! You died 2 years ago!" the Batarian said angrily.

"I got better." Austin replied, causing Liara to chuckle a bit.

"And you... I remember you from last time. Your that Asari that's new to his squad." said Balak as he pointed at Liara.

The Asari simply remained silent.

"I'll give you some credit, Balak. You escaped from one of the most technologically advanced and smartest race in the galaxy. Not bad." said Austin.

"They need better security systems." said Balak.

"Perhaps you can tell them that yourselves?" said Liara demandingly.

"My thoughts exactly. You're coming with us, Balak. This is your last chance." said Austin.

"No. He's not going anywhere with you." said the soldier.

"We weren't wasn't asking you." said Liara.

The Asari then aimed her rifle at the soldier and fired. The shot hit the Batarian soldier right in the chest.

"NO!" Balak shouted, angrily.

However, the soldier instantly jumped back up and he unsheathed his extra-large knife. With lightning fast reflexes, he zoomed right up towards Austin and kicked him in Balak's direction.

Balak quickly reacted to this and punched Austin hard in the face, causing him to fall.

"Austin!" Liara yelled.

Balak quickly took out his pistol and fired at Liara, forcing the Asari to take cover behind a nearby crate. She managed to blind fire one shot before the soldier swung at her with his knife. Liara only managed another shot before the knife parried the gun out of her hands.

Right as the rifle flew out of her hands however, Liara instantly unsheathed her sword and it clashed with the soldier's knife.

Austin meanwhile had finally recovered from his earlier punch. He swung his leg, causing Balak to trip on it and fall. The helldiver rolled back onto his feet and went to bring his fist down on Balak's face. The Batarian just managed to troll out of the way as the Helldiver's fist smashed into the floor, creating a slight dent in the metal.

Balak instantly rolled back onto his feet too and reactivated his omni blade.

"This ends here, Shepard. This time you'll stay dead." the Batarian growled.

"Have it your way, Balak. It's your funeral." said Austin as he unsheathed Excalibur from his back and stood up, Balak did the

same.

The two opponents attacked and sparks flew as their blades clashed with one another. Austin couldn't help but feel a somewhat nostalgic feel as he once again seemed to be fighting this Batarian. Every time they had fought one another, Balak had always obtained some sort of injury. The most extreme had been when Excalibur had taken the Batarian's eye.

Balak made another swing, but it was too slow, allowing Austin to duck under it and then slide right between Balak's legs. The Helldiver then grabbed him from behind, flung him over his head and slammed him into the ground, hard. Austin then kicked him hard as the Batarian tried to get back up on his feet.

It was now two versus two as Liara battled with the soldier, and Austin with Balak. Both Austin and Liara were no really putting their fencing skills to the test, especially Liara since this was the sort of thing she had trained for.

Both groups clashed back and forth across the room. Sparks seemed to fly each time their blades made contact. The Batarian soldier was proving to be a fair challenge for Liara due to the ferocity and speed of his attacks.

Eventually, both Balak and the soldier forced Austin and Liara together, so they were now back to back. Both Batarians went into battle stances, ready to continue.

"This'll be interesting." Austin thought.

"That it will." he heard Liara say.

There was something slightly different about her voice. It was almost as though...

"Did we just hear each other's thoughts?" he asked in his mind. He'd know if Liara replied in the same way.

"Yes... yes we did." Liara replied, sounding just as surprised as he was.

"How's that possible? How are we communicating telepathically?" Austin asked.

"Do you remember something I said when we had our first union?" Liara replied.

"Not sure I... Oh!"

Austin then remembered what Liara had once said on the night before Ilos when they had first truly joined their minds. If a Union bond was strong enough and done enough time, some side effects could be the ability for bond mates to hear each other's thoughts.

"Yes. You mentioned something about a telepathic link. But why are we suddenly able to do it now? We didn't use to be able to." he asked.

"Must be both our adrenals. This the first time we've actually thought side by side. Any other times we've just been sparring or fighting other opponents, but never the same." Liara thought.

Still the two Batarians dared not move yet. At least the good thing about this new telepathy was that no one else could hear what they were saying to one another. That then gave Austin an idea.

"You know, this might not be a bad thing. In fact, I think we can use this to our advantage." he thought.

"How?" he heard Liara reply.

"Think about it. We can speak to each other without anyone else hearing. We can warn each other of attacks an enemy's we ourselves might not see. If you ask me, I'd say that with practice, we can use this to coordinate each other's attacks." Austin suggested.

"No bond mates have ever tried it that way before." said Liara. "But that doesn't mean it isn't possible. With some practice, it may work."

"No time like the present then." said Austin.

"Bring it on then."

"We'll have both your heads as trophies." said Balak intimidatingly.

Both Austin and Liara looked at one another for a minute as their thoughts returned to the two Batarians they were fighting. Austin nodded to her and the two twirled their swords before going into fighting stances as well.

"You want our heads? Come and get them!" said Austin.

Both Batarians lunged at their opponents and the fight resumed.

The telepathy did take some getting used to. Talking to each other didn't really do the trick as their reactions just weren't fast enough. Saying things like, "to the left" "behind you" or even "look out" weren't as effective as they could've been.

Soon however, quite by accident, Austin managed to find the secret. He saw the soldier thrust at Liara while her back was turned. His thoughts instantly pictured it. Just as he was about to speak, Liara whirled around and blocked the blow before then delivering a sharp kick to the soldier.

Austin then felt something in his head, something instantly telling him that Balak was right behind him. He instantly looked back and thrust. Balak only just managed to avoid Excalibur's blade.

Now the two bond mates knew how they could use their bond in combat. They didn't say their strategies to one another, they simply had to think them.

Both Batarians were really struggling now. The two Helldivers had suddenly got even better. Every attack they tried was either blocked or a sudden thrust would interrupt them as Austin or Liara would coordinate their thrusts so that they went around the other to then hit their target. A good tactic that had the element of surprise. Sometimes, one of them would even duck so that the other could then swing over them.

In all his life, Balak had never seen such coordination and skill. They practically seemed to fight as though they were one. It even felt like fighting someone with four arms.

Now we're getting the hang of it!" Austin thought.

Indeed. All that training and sparring is paying off." Liara thought back.

Austin ducked again and quickly thought it. Liara instantly reacted. She kicked the soldier first and then swung her leg over her bond mate and knocked Balak across the face. The soldier swung at Liara but she then ducked under it as Austin instantly sent a warning



thought to her. The continued on for several long minutes. Neither side had the advantage at the moment, but the telepathic bond was proving very useful.

The battle continued to rage on before the two Helldivers eventually gained the upper hand. Liara made several hard strikes against the Batarian soldier before kicking him away. Balak quickly followed from behind. Liara was quick however to parry his lunge and then delivered a kick to his face.

Only too late did Balak notice Austin as he staggered and he was unable to bring his omni blade up in time. Excalibur carved right through his red armour and deep wound was instantly on his chest.

The Batarian soldier meanwhile had recovered and was once again duelling Liara. The Asari's skill and speed however served her well. A sudden uppercut from her knocked the Batarian's knife out of his hand. As it flipped in the air however, the soldier caught it, this time holding it back hand.

Austin was fortunately was able to see this and he quickly sent another thought to Liara so that she was made aware of the Batarian's next move.

As the Batarian swung, Liara back flipped. The knife just narrowly missed her. The Asari then very cleverly kicked the knife with her feet causing it to fly out of the soldier's hand and become embedded high in the ceiling.

Liara then swung leg at the Batarian's, tripping him up. As the soldier slowly got up, he only just noticed Austin swing Excalibur at him and just barely moved in time.

As the soldier rolled out of the way, something rather surprising happened. To Austin's somewhat surprise, the soldier then seemed to somehow split into two. Now there where two soldiers standing next to one another.

Now that's cheating." Austin thought. "No matter though. Two can play at that game."

Using his free hand, the Helldiver unsheathed his combat knife and he swung both that and Excalibur at the two soldiers. The hologram naturally disappeared due to the distortion while the knife slashed the Batarian's side. Austin then quickly followed this by running him

through, Excalibur's Kartalrium blade cleaving right through his armour, flesh, and bone.

The soldier went limp and Austin pushed him off of his blade. Right as he and Liara turned to Balak however, they found an unwelcome sight.

Balak had a colonist in his arms with a gun pointed at her head.

You sneaky son of a bitch." Said Austin coldly as he and Liara pointed their guns at him.

"You let me leave, or she dies." Said Balak.

Not gonna make us drop our guns?" said Liara.

I'm not a fool. I know I can't kill you with this." Said Balak.

"Please! Help me!" the woman nearly cried.

It's alright. We're not gonna let him hurt you." Said Austin calmly.

"Let me leave and she's all yours. You try anything and you'll have her death on your hands." Said Balak.

Alright. Just give her to us." Said Austin.

How do I know you won't shoot me if I do?" the Batarian retorted.

There is such a thing as Helldiver nobility, even if you don't think so. Besides, our orders were to take you alive. You're no good to us dead. So for now, you leave us no choice but to let you go." Said Austin.

This isn't over, Shepard. Not by a long shot!" said Balak.

He then pushed the colonist towards Austin who caught her in his arms. The Batarian then hurried through a nearby door, and pressed a button. The door closed and sealed itself.

Thank you! Thank you so much!" the colonist sobbed into Austin's arms.

It's okay. You're safe now." Said Austin calmly.

I thought you'd let him kill me for a minute."

"That's not how we work." Said Liara as she patted the colonist on the shoulder and simply nodded to her bond mate.

The Arkane council had been a bit disappointed that Balak had got away, but they were happy that the colony was secure again, and after reading Austin's report on the hostage situation, they understood his decision to let Balak go. Part of the Helldiver code was to never let an innocent life be killed, even if it meant aborting the mission.

Overall, the call to the council had gone slightly better than Austin had hoped for. Since he expected that another crew member would have another mission they wanted done soon, he decided to simply pass the time again. This time, he decided to have a chat with Miranda. See how she was doing.

"Major, what can I do for you?" she asked as she took notice of him.

"Do you have a minute, Miranda?" Austin asked.

"Of course. I'd been meaning to speak with you, in fact." said Miranda as she stood up from her desk and walked over to the couch she had in her quarters. Both she and Austin sat down on it.

"I... wanted to apologise. I didn't fully believe you or this squad would be up to the task when Jacob and I defected. It seems I was wrong. Frankly, based on what I've seen, I'm starting to think that maybe... maybe joining Cerberus was a mistake." said Miranda.

"You don't sound totally convinced. Look, if you have something you want to get off your chest, do so." said Austin.

"Was that a reference too...?" Miranda asked slightly cross

"I... sorry. That slipped out." said Austin, rather embarrassed by saying that. He should have thought about that before saying it.

"Don't worry. I've had a lot worse jokes about my body, believe me." Miranda chuckled slightly "Anyway, you are somewhat right. There are still aspects about Cerberus that I still believe are right, but now seeing things from a different perspective... well..."

"What's bothering you, Miranda? Are you still worried about your

sister?" Austin asked.

"No. Not at all. I know that she'll be safe where she has, and she has you and the Arkanes protecting her now. I couldn't be happier with that." said Miranda. "It's just that... I worked for Cerberus for so long. It's hard to see them in the way you see them, to see them for what they really are. I'm slowly beginning to see why it is you and the others have kept your distance."

"You had plenty of opportunities to stab us in the back, yet you haven't taken them. Plus, the fact that you were willing to trust us with your sister's safety really does say something." said Austin.

"I... I hadn't realized... Thank you. I thought you'd always hate me because I was Cerberus. Thought you'd never forgive me." said Miranda, somewhat lost for words.

"I trust you, but I don't trust Cerberus. Your experiments cross the line." said Austin.

"All the time, yes. But just in the interest of fairness, I'll bet some Helldivers have crossed a few lines from time to time." said Miranda.

"Only when we have to, Miranda. It's only ever as a last resort." said Austin, a bit more seriously this time.

"It's funny. The Illusive Man said the same thing to me, and yet some of those experiments seemed as though they'd been done without a second thought. That Experiment 13 was a prime example." said Miranda.

"What was Cerberus trying to prove by experimenting on children like Jack?" Austin asked.

"A mistake. No question. Not mine." Miranda replied.

"Careful she doesn't hear you say that, Miranda. Even now, she's still looking for an excuse to kill you." said Austin.

"That mistake was corrected once we discovered the extent of the experiments being performed. We helped stop it." said Miranda.

"Forgive me for asking this, Miranda. I expect you've been asked it a hundred times, but with your intelligence, you could've landed any job you wanted. Why choose Cerberus?" Austin asked.

"Because I still envy the time Mordin spent with the Special Tasks Group, working with people as smart as he was. Cerberus never tells me something is impossible. They give me my orders and say, "Do it." said Miranda. "And yet the Arkanes have given you more. Your suit gave you a new life; they gave you a new ship and even their personal attention..."

"What, you disapprove?" said Austin.

"No! I'm just impressed. You're... well, look at you." said Miranda. "You're quite a mystery to many. Few people know where you came from. Even Cerberus doesn't know your full history..."

She then stood up and walked towards the window, looking out into the deepness of space.

"And you've done more than I could. Despite everything my father did to make me perfect, you're... you're the best humanity has to offer, even for a Helldiver." she said.

"No offense, Miranda. But does it always have to come back to this? I get that you were designed to be perfect." said Austin, doing his best to hide the boredom in his voice.

"This is what I am, Shepard. I can't hide it. The intelligence, the looks, the body, even the biotics... he paid for all of that. Every one of your accomplishments is due to your skill. The only things I can take credit for are my mistakes." said Miranda, regrettably.

"I can't admire you're body or your mind? You give your father too much credit. Yeah, he gave you gifts. But you can be proud of what you've done with them." said Austin reassuringly.

"Oh. Thank you." said Miranda, rather flattered by this.

The Ex-Cerberus operative then turned to face Austin, giving a somewhat seductive pose. "Perhaps I wouldn't mind if you admired my body."

Austin quickly realized what he'd just said and how Miranda could so easily take that wrong.

"Oh god." he groaned. "Miranda, I am so sorry. I didn't mean it like that. What is the matter with me today? I'm blurting things out that I

shouldn't."

"You're just saying that. Don't try to hide it. I've seen the way you and all the men look at me." Miranda smiled at him suggestively.

"What? No! No, it's nothing like that! I just..." Austin said, now for the first time in many years utterly lost for words. "Excuse me. I'm gonna leave now before I make this any worse."

Without even giving Miranda a chance to speak, the Helldiver quickly left the room, sealing the door behind him.

"What the hell is wrong with you, Austin?!" he cursed in his head as he made his way to the elevator. Spending some time in his quarters would hopefully allow him to clear his mind.

Miranda meanwhile was left simply standing where she was. Despite this though, she still smiled as she watched her doors close.

"You can hide it all you want, Shepard. But I know what you're really thinking. I'm not scared. I'm cautious, but interested. Very interested..."

# THE OBLIVION CRISIS

## CHAPTER 1: HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Yaell Novella

Credits:

- Bethesda Softworks: this is a work of fiction based on the game Oblivion, which belongs to the game studio Bethesda Softworks. All rights belong to them.
- The Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages: this is a website devoted to the Elder Scrolls series, which I used to consult in order to fill in the journal entries and follow the quest lines.
- The Elder Scrolls Wikia: this too is a website devoted to the Elder Scrolls series, which I consulted for extra information whenever the UESP didn't give enough information, but also to follow the quest lines and the journal entries.

The young, fair-skinned elf was lurking in the bushes. She had been trailing a large elk for a few hours by now, and finally it had started grazing in the right position for her to shoot. About bloody time, she thought. Night was falling already. She took a deep, quiet breath and laid one of her hand-made arrows on the bow. Her aim was steady as usual, not showing how nervous she actually was. This was the first time she had tried taking on a prey as big as this one.

Then she let go of it. The elk's head shot up, hearing the buzzing sound, but it was already too late. The arrow pierced through the air and struck the elk right through its heart. Feria immediately shot from between the dark, tall trees and ran towards her prey, squatting down next to it. Clean shot, just like her foster father had taught her.

She started skinning and cutting up the beast, putting the separate pieces of meat in different bags. What she couldn't carry, she hid in holes under trees and other places. The bones and leftovers she left behind, to distract wild animals. It was already late at night when she finally finished the job, knowing her parents were still waiting for her to get home with something to eat.

The young Altmer woman was an orphan, and had been raised by a Nord couple since she was little. She had only few memories of her real parents. Her foster father had taught her basically everything she knew: how to avoid the guards when stealing, which berries and fruits were edible and which were poisonous, basic things about sword

fighting and archery, ...

Feria took all she could carry with and started her way back to the small shack where they lived, in the south of Skyrim, near a lake in Falkreath hold. She had known right from the start it would be one heck of a trip back home, especially since she had to be careful for wolves and robbers that could be preying on her and her loot.

The vast amount of meat was too much for the small family, but what they didn't need themselves, Feria's mother would go sell in either Falkreath, Helgen or Riverwood, the cities closest to their shack. The antlers and hide would fetch a nice price on the market, too, since they weren't damaged at all by the shot.

When Feria got back, her father cheerfully greeted her, amazed that she could've shot such a good prey from the first try. "There's still some hidden in the wood," Feria said as she dropped her bags alongside the side of the shack. "We could get it tomorrow morning," she suggested, as her father checked on the loot.

"Good catch," he noticed, opening one of the bags. "And you say there's even more?" He looked positively surprised. "Freya, you'll have to go to the village tomorrow," he said to his wife. He messed up Feria's hair, full of pride that his daughter had become so mature already. They seemed to forget how long it had been since she was just a kid.

Her mother greeted her, happy to see such a successful hunt. "I'll prepare a good dinner tonight," she promised her husband and daughter. "Andor, go chop some wood for the cooking fire, will you?" Her husband obediently went to get his axe, winking at his daughter and saying: "I'm glad she cooks so good." He chuckled lightly before continuing to chop the wood, which Feria then would carry to her mother.

That night was one of those on which everything went perfect. Maybe too perfect. Sometimes, when things went too well, it meant that what would follow would go worse. Just because it couldn't get better.

The following morning looked promising. The sky was azure blue and the sun greeted Feria as she stepped outside the shack. She wasn't dressed and let the warm sunrays warm her bare skin. Her parents were still sleeping. It was about six in the morning. Usually they would get up an hour after Feria, allowing Feria to get washed down the river.



Never would she go without her bow and arrows, though, since it was known that there were wolves and robbers near the place where they lived. Feria gathered her clothes from all over the place and folded them. She piled them all, took them under her arm and went to the river. It wasn't far from the shack, but far enough not to see anything.

The cold water embraced her ankles as a greeting, like it would do every morning. Feria was used to the bare circumstances of nature. In the evening the water would be warmer, because the sun had warmed it up all day, but the cold woke Feria up, making her more alert for the rest of the day. She waded through the water to the deeper parts, until the water reached her hips.

It took a while to adjust to the cold water. Feria dove underwater. She held her eyes wide open, enjoying to see the rocky bottom of the river. She remained under water as long as she could, holding her breath until her lungs seemed to be about to explode. She pushed herself back to the surface. The water exploded on the surface as she broke through it

She shook her head, getting the water out of her long, blonde hair. She rubbed her body clean and enjoyed swinging around for a little bit more. "Time to be heading back", Feria thought. She waded back to the side, towards her clothes. But instead of putting them on after drying herself, she started picking certain edible herbs. The sun would dry her skin soon enough.

Feria was picking a mountain flower when a strange sound caught her ear. She immediately grabbed her bow and arrows, and remained with her belongings. She had already readied an arrow and glanced around, trying to figure out where the sound had come from and what it was.

Again she heard a sound, but this time it was further away. "Voices", Feria whispered, lowering her bow. She rapidly got dressed and rushed towards the shack. But before she could arrive there, she heard more of those voices. Quickly she hid behind one of the trees – just in time. A group of bandits passed her.

As in a reflex, Feria held her breath. Her arrow was still lying readied on her bow, but she didn't dare jump from behind the tree. For a short moment it seemed like time had stopped. She counted. Five, six, at least seven bandits, she thought. Two were going to the left, two headed straightforward and three to the right. They were surrounding the shack.

A sharp smell pierced her nose. Fire. The bandits had torched. Suddenly Feria realized what was going on, and if she didn't act quickly... No, she couldn't think of that. In the blink of an eye, she jumped from behind the tree and let go of the arrow. She didn't look whether it had hit its target, but took cover behind another tree again.

A dimmed sound of something heavy hitting the ground told her that the arrow had found its way through the soft leather armor of the bandit, right through his heart. She laid two new arrows on her bow. She could do this, she kept telling herself. She had to. Then she jumped.

She jumped from behind the tree, back to the tree she had first come from, and made a gracious dive-roll. She ended up sitting on her knee, her bow aimed at the bandits. Immediately she corrected her aim, and let go of the arrows. This time, she saw how they both pierced the throats of the bandits. But she had caught their attention now.

Three down, four more to go. Feria shot up and made a run for it. She heard how the bandits started following her. She didn't look back, but ran as fast as she could, listening to the bandits behind. One, she counted, two, three... four. No. The fourth was missing.

While still running, she took a new arrow out of her quiver. She ran onto a rock and pushed herself off from it, jumping high into the air. While she was floating, she turned her body around, aimed, and shot. As the arrow went in the robber's eye, she felt a little bit of relief. She could do this. It wasn't only something she kept telling herself, she showed she could do this.

Feria then hit the ground. Her back made the disturbing sound of a branch being broken. It hurt, but she could still move. Feria rolled on her stomach and crawled up as fast as she could. Some of her arrows had fallen out of her quiver, but there was no time to pick them up. The two bandits that were left had already reached the rock. One of them jumped over the edge, and dropped right next to her. The other came on to her from the other side.

Feria was still low by the ground, trying to figure out how she could escape from them. She didn't have a sword, or anything that could be used for short-ranged attacks. At that moment, one of the bandits jumped towards her, not allowing her to think any further.

In a reflex, she grabbed one of the arrows that were next to her feet and planted it in his head. Meanwhile, the other bandit attacked her

too. She took a quick step aside and smashed her bow in his face. Clearly he hadn't been expecting this. The bandit staggered and took a few steps back, his nose bleeding.

But the bow hadn't been strong enough and it had broken into two. Feria threw it aside and jumped forward, grabbing the bandit by his waist. He stumbled back even further, surprised by the strength of such a young elven woman.

Feria threw the bandit aside, causing him to trip over the pieces of her bow and fall right onto the rock. The snapping told her his neck was broken, and if that hadn't been enough, his skull was crushed too. No way he would be able to survive that.

Feria gathered the arrows that were lying on the ground. She'd have to ask her father to help her make a new bow, she realized. But a sudden thought struck her. She had killed six bandits, but there had been seven.

"By the gods," she muttered. At the same time, her body had already started to move. She ran back to the shack, her heart racing in panic. How could she be so stupid? Oh, if she only weren't too late. She ran and ran her legs off, back to the shack.

But from a distance, she noticed a column of smoke rise in the air. The bandit that had stayed behind probably had looted everything valuable from the shack and burnt it down to the ground, expecting the other robbers to join him soon enough. They had heavily underestimated Feria's skills in combat.

When she arrived, Feria saw the robber. He had planted everything valuable on a horse – it hadn't been that much – but she couldn't see her parents. Her eyes immediately shot to the shack, and only little hope remained that she would ever see them alive again. Without thinking, she threw herself onto the robber.

He wasn't too difficult to kill, as Feria had the advantage of the element of surprise. A rock formed the perfect murder weapon. When the bandit had been hit to the ground, Feria bashed it onto his head repeatedly. Even when he didn't move anymore, she wouldn't stop.

When she finally stopped hitting the bandit, her anger had already disappeared, making place for a sadness she had only witnessed long ago, when she had lost her real parents. She couldn't remember

anything of it. Eventually she stood up, realizing she couldn't stay there any longer.

The fire continued to burn for a long time still, until dawn broke even. Feria had tried putting it out, called her parents' names, but no reply had come, and her hope had been lost after several times trying. When the fire went out, she entered the shack. Cautiously, and prepared for the worst.

She did find her parents, but couldn't stand being around for far too long. They had been burned alive, their bodies rendered to coal. They were desperately clinging onto each other, and had died that way. Feria went outside again, the tears finally getting the upper hand. The salty drops rolled down her cheeks, but she didn't even notice.

Thinking wasn't really possible anymore. She had to say goodbye to this place. But before she could leave, she would pay her last respects to the people that had taken care of her all her life long. She started digging a deep hole, a grave fit for two. It took more than a day to finally finish it, but she didn't realize. Her hands were sore, but she couldn't care.

Feria took one of the linen cloths the bandit had stacked onto the horse. She spread it out next to her parents' corpses and carefully placed them onto them. The ashes got onto her hands, though she didn't wipe them off. She dragged the cloth to the hole and as cautious as she could, she lowered her parents in the grave.

Then she closed the cloth, preserving the earth to touch the bodies. She pushed the sand back in the hole, covering them up entirely. She patted the small hill of sand and placed a circle of rocks around it, indicating there were people buried there. She placed some flowers on top of it, arranged them neatly and then knelt in front of it. A last prayer to Arkay, the god of burial rites, before she would cross the border to Cyrodiil.

The horse was already packed tightly, everything valuable had been saved by the fire. She could sell those items and try starting a new life in Cyrodiil, and perhaps she would return to this place later. Feria hadn't rode on horseback often before, so it promised to be a long road.

She lifted herself onto the saddle. Slowly, but certainly, the horse started walking. She guided it into the mountains. About a day later, she would arrive in Bruma, or so she thought. Her father had often told

about the city in the north.

But she had heavily miscalculated the trip. When the night fell, she hadn't even crossed the mountains yet. As Feria slid off the horse, she realized how painful the ride had been. The soreness of her behind would certainly keep her awake. She started putting up her camp to get some rest. It was rather late already, and the next day promised to be a long one at this rate.

Feria curled up in her sleeping bag, trying to protect herself against the cold. True, she was used to some cold during winter, but in the mountains it was always a tad bit colder. Her camp was set up near the road, where few wild animals would pass by, and more guards. "Guards are nice," Feria muttered "they protect weak people."

Finally she closed her eyes, enjoying what little sleep she would get. A long trip would indeed follow, but not to Bruma. Sudden voices woke her up in the middle of the night. "You there, come with us. You're going to jail."

# THE MASK OF HAPPINESS: CHAPTER 5

by ReizY ouUp  
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It had been two days since Tsuki and The Happy Mask Salesman had aquired the ocarina and already they had made it into Kokiri Forest. These woods separated Hyrule from Termina. It would be the only way for them to get where they were going. They had been walking without a moment's rest since they had left the desert. They had reached a large Deku tree in the middle of the clearing, when The Happy Mask Salesman spoke up.

"Let's stop here for a while." he said.

"Alright." replied Tsuki.

The Happy Mask Salesman took off his bag as he rested underneath the tree. Tsuki skootched over to see what was in it.

"Now be careful, Tsuki." said The Happy Mask Salesman. "You don't want to touch any of my masks. Those masks are very powerful items and should not be in the hands of any who do not know how to use them properly."

"Don't worry. I won't touch any of them."

With that, The Happy Mask Salesman fell fast asleep. Tsuki was about to fall asleep, too but she could not take her eyes off of The Happy Mask Salesman's mask bag. She decided it could not hurt to take a look. She checked inside of the bag and found the mask that shot out purple prisms, the mask in the shape of the dog, and the mirror mask that he had packed from earlier. She decided to take a closer look at the dog mask. She turned it over on the other side, looking through the eye holes without putting it on. In that moment, The Happy Mask Salesman awoke.

"Don't touch that mask!" he yelled.

Tsuki was surprised by The Happy Mask Salesman's loud voice and immediately dropped the mask. A poof of blue smoke came forth from where it fell and with it a large black dog with horns on its head appeared. A long blue mane sprouted from its head. One of its back hind limbs was not fully attached to its body and was hovering. It glared at Tsuki with a vicious snarl as it entered a pouncing position.

Without a moment's hesitation, The Happy Mask Salesman intervened between the dog and Tsuki. However, instead of getting out a mask, he set himself to concentrate deeply. He put his hands out in front of him to teleport an object from a great distance. From out of thin air came a giant musical organ. It landed right on top of the dog, knocking it out. The Happy Mask Salesman quickly teleported to the organ. There he sat at it and cracked his knuckles.

"You may want to get the ocarina out. I'd like you to remember this song. It is called The Song of Healing."

The Happy Mask Salesman began to play the song. Tsuki followed along with the ocarina. Together they played until the magic dog shrank down into its mask form again.

"Thank you for saving me." said Tsuki once it was all over.

The Happy Mask Salesman did not respond. He had his back turned to Tsuki and was still at the organ. Suddenly he slammed his hands down on the organ in a fit of anger. He turned to face Tsuki, his eyes gleaming red, looking as though he were about to explode.

"I thought I told you to not touch my masks!" he ranted. "When you almost put on that creature mask, but not really, you summoned that dog! It is a good thing you did not actually put it on or you would have become a dog! I cannot believe you are the one I am destined to be with!"

The Happy Mask Salesman was positively fuming with rage. He was so mad, he really wanted to shake something. Since shaking his own fiance was against him, he went right up to the tree he was lying under before and shook it.

"Calm down!" Tsuki screamed.

It seemed to have no effect on The Happy Mask Salesman who continued shaking the poor tree until its leaves began to fall. Tsuki tugged his shirt collar and pulled him downwards.

"Cross your arms and legs then close your eyes." she said. "We're going to meditate."

The Happy Mask Salesman heaved a great sigh, then proceeded to do as she said.

"Now take a deep breath. I want you to tell me five things you hear."

"Mmmm... I hear the wind blowing softly, the birds chirping, leaves falling... Hmmm... Nothing else."

"Okay then. Open you're eyes and tell me five things you see."

"I see the trees, the sky, the grass, the flowers, and you."

"You're doing really good, so far. Now tell me five things you smell."

"Smell?" The Happy Mask Salesman repeated.

"Oh, sorry." Tsuki said. "That one was a little strange."

"No, actually, I smell... Perfume? Is that you, too? You smell nice."

"Thank you. ...Did any of that help you?"

"A little. Tell me, do any others of the tribe meditate?"

"Oh, yes. Many of the tribe's members are avid meditators. It helps to relieve stress, anger, and a quick meditation can also help us to focus our powers better."

"Really? I did not know that. Thank you for this



new information."

Tsuki got up. "Ready to go?"

The Happy Mask Salesman followed suit. "Yes. Let us go."

"You really need to controll that anger of your's, Sato."

"I would not need to had you not touched one of my masks."

"I'm sorry. It won't happen again."

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They were walking along for sometime when they came across another traveller. The man looked to be just like any ordinary traveller, as he did not have any wares to sell. He carried nothing more than a walking stick and a red backpack. Tsuki was a little ways in front of the salesman, as he was trailing a bit behind because of the weight of his mask bag. They were coming up the hill when the man passed them by.

"Good day." he greeted Tsuki.

"Hi there." she smiled back.

Then came The Happy Mask Salesman's turn.

"Hello there." he said with one of his giant looming grins.

"Ugh!" the traveler cried.

He was possitively taken aback by this display. The seller of masks' face was obviously too terrifying for the man to handle. The Happy Mask Salesman still did not yet realize this and took out one of his masks. It was the reflective, mirror-like one.

"Excuse me sir. You seem like a reasonable man. Would you like to take a look at what I have for sale?"

The man was completely stunned that the salesman even talked to him.

"What's wrong with you, you creep?!"

The Happy Mask Salesman's grin turned sour. It was happening again.

"Who are you calling 'creep', you jerk!"

The Happy Mask Salesman was surprised to find that Tsuki was defending him. Well, maybe it was not that surprising, but he was certainly grateful for it.

"We should have you pay us money without us handing over a mask for that comment!" she continued. "How could you be so rude?!"

"Look lady," said the man. "I'm not buying any of your stupid masks. You can tell your friend they're just as weird as he is."

"That happens to be my fiance you're talkin' to, bub! Fine! We don't need any of your crummy cash! Just keep walking!"

"Hmmp, fine! I will!"

The man passed them by without saying a single word more. Tsuki looked back to find The Happy Mask Salesman staring deeply into the mirror-like mask. She almost would have thought he was trying to see into the future, but then she remembered it was impossible for the tribe's members to see into their own futures.

"Are you okay?"

He looked up. "Y-yes. I will be fine. It is just that it happens far too often for my own liking."

"What happens?"

The Happy Mask Salesman put his mask back, then continued to walk.

"Nothing. We better get moving."

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Nabooru had since made her way to Ganondorf's new palace and stood outside wondering how to get in. There was no way she could simply walk in as the huge lava pit blocked her path.

"Ganondorf!" she called out his name.

The king of darkness was looking at her through his crystal ball. He raised his hand and recited a dark enchantation.

"Rubicundum sanguineumque pons resurgunt!  
Blood red bridge rise!"

A bright, deep red bridge made of blood rose to welcome Nabooru. She tested it for safety with her foot before crossing it. Ganondorf came down from his chambers to greet her.

"You are not here on orders, Nabooru. What is the meaning of this?"

"I should be asking you the same thing. You ordered Iayisha's women to track down two travellers holding an ocarina. Why is that?"

"That ocarina holds the key to my taking of Hyrule. Its magical song can open a doorway into an unseen realm. Once I enter it, I will obtain untold power! That is the reason why I ordered them to retrieve it for me."

"And the tighttented security?"

"All according to plan. I would not have wanted anything going amiss while I was away."

"Unfortunately, something did. I let two travellers holding an ocarina get by us while the gate was being guarded."

"Insolence! Now it will take even longer to track them down! You can make up what you've done by feeding the prisoner."

He handed her a bowl of gruel, then went back to his chambers. Nabooru went down a flight of stairs to the dungeon. The heat from the lava felt somewhat soothing on her desert skin. She walked to the middle of the floor where another blood bridge was there to greet her. She crossed it to the prisoner's cage where she was stunned to see poor Link there.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Nabooru. I should be asking what a young child such as yourself is doing here."

"Ganondorf put me in here."

"Well, I should have a word with him about this!"

She stepped aside to let Link out when the door was magically slammed shut behind her. She ran and grabbed at the bars.

"What is the meaning of this?!" she shouted.

Ganondorf appeared at the bridge.

"That will be enough out of you, Nabooru. No more disobeying orders."

Nabooru jumped from wall to wall of the cage until she got to the top. There, she attempted cut the rope holding it up. The cage splashed down into the lake of lava. The door came open due to the impact. Link held onto one of the bars for support, then stepped on it once the cage reached the lake. He and Nabooru ran on it until they got to the door which was now facing the ceiling. Nabooru picked Link up and threw him through the opening.

Link landed on the other side of the lava lake where he ran to get Navi. Ganondorf was just about to go after him, when he was blocked by Nabooru. She tried to slash at him with her sword, but Ganondorf shielded himself with his magic cape. He threw a ball of energy at her which managed to knock the sword out of her hands. Now that she was defenseless, Ganondorf grabbed her and took her to the regular cell which circled the room. Link had just released Navi who flitted around the room until she found Ganondorf and bounced on his head. Ganondorf grabbed both Navi and Link and returned them to their respective cells. Link went with Nabooru.

"Now I have a dungeon to clean up." said Ganondorf, once it was over.

He returned to his chambers. He would fix the cage later.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Back in Kakariko, Impa had taken Zelda to the old Sheikah training grounds. It was behind the fence near where the cucco lady, Anju's house was. There was Deku trees all around for the Sheikah to jump from tree to tree and to cast Deku nuts. They were in a clearing of a circle of tree stumps, each going up in the air where they reached the tree tops. Zelda was in Sheikah clothing so as to not ruin her dress.

"Why are we here?" Zelda asked.

"To test you." Impa stated. "If you can pass three tests, I will let you go on the mission with I and the guard. Now. Follow me!"

With that, Impa jumped from stump to stump until Zelda could not see her anymore. Zelda hesitated a moment, then hopped after her. She almost fell over one time, but picked herself up and went to the very tops of the trees.

The leaves blotted out the sunlight. Zelda stood in front of Impa, awaiting her next orders.

"Good. Now let us see if you cannot avoid this!"

Impa took a Deku nut from a tree branch and flung it at her. Zelda shielded her eyes and duck.

"You are doing well, princess. Now take a Deku nut and throw it at me."

Zelda nodded her head, then proceeded to do as instructed. Impa got ready to duck, but was instantly struck by the nut. She fell backwards, down into the trees.

"Impa!" Zelda cried.

She could hear every branch snap as Impa fell further and further towards the ground. In that instant,

she caught herself on a branch. Zelda jumped down to the branch that Impa was on.

"Impa! Are you alright?"

"More than alright now that I've seen what you can do, princess. I am very proud that you progressed so well. Now then. Let us give you a disguise."

Impa raised her hand and recited an incantation. "Nubibus adumbratis!"

Zelda's skin transformed to a brown color, like that of the Sheikah. Impa stood looking over Zelda, full of pride.

"Now you are ready."

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Sakon and The Curiosity Shop Owner had made their way through Kokiri Forest much quicker than The Happy Mask Salesman and Tsuki. It was now the night and they came across an old house to rest at. Its door was off the hinges and was completely gone. Its roof was worn and light filtered softly from the blue ceiling. The furniture was all still there, but was covered with dust.

"Who used to live in a place like this?" Sakon questioned as he looked all around.

"This was once an inventor's workshop." The Curiosity Shop Owner responded.

"How do you know that? Did you meet the guy who used to own this place?"

"You could say that..."

Sakon placed the packages on the ground and found a chair to sit on. There he sat where he found a lever.

"What does this do?"

"Don't touch that!"

Sakon pulled the lever and the chair rose into the air. It went through a hole in the roof, up to a glass

dome.

"Wow! Is this a skylight?!"

Sakon could see the stars lit up in the night sky. They glistened like so many twinkling lanterns. It was a spectacular view, considering where he sat. He was having a great time, then The Curiosity Shop Owner pulled the lever.

"Hey, what gives?" said Sakon, as the chair levelled down to the floor.

"Now don't get any ideas, Sakon. We're only resting here for a moment. Don't touch anything else."

"You're no fun."

In the midst of the darkness, Sakon spotted something on a table.

"Hey, what's that?"

# POETRY

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John Mahler's Quotes of the Day

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

Some people, at least, have enjoyed my Quotes of the Day, so here they are, for your amusement and bemusement: one entire year's worth of quotes. My quotes by the way; nobody else's. These are my thoughts and observations on the world around us: funny, sad, uplifting, evocative, inspiring, silly, and occasionally just plain stupid, they are all here for your perusal: enjoy!



# I SEE YOU MY DARLING

Maria Kubiak

I see you my darling.  
You are mine now.  
I will put you safe in my heart.  
I see you my darling.  
You are pushing me away.  
You don't know it,  
But my heart is bleeding.  
I see you my darling.  
Why don't you love me?  
Is she better than me?  
I see you my darling,  
I see you in my dreams.

# CLENCH

Jon Ritter

Good movements and  
warm light  
from a second story  
window.  
Oil from the fingers  
tilted head  
staring contests  
with the walls-  
words that break up  
easily, calmly and  
without argument or  
pulling out the muscle fibers  
in your wrists,  
worse than handcuffs  
and innocence  
in a concrete room.

Now listen to this:

I want you calm and  
enraptured-  
a timid spider  
touches the edge of  
a sugary cola drop  
from the lips parting for light.

I want you without predation.  
I want you with forgiveness  
and angerless,  
the mountains have gone dry  
and sleepy from  
watching over the hills.

And cold  
so very cold.

I want you broken  
and untouched by man.  
Without faith. Undirected  
rage, a passion for

the romantic wars.  
The warmth comes close  
but is stopped at the edge of the skin.

With every breath my life is given off  
as moisture and heat and words and air,  
you cannot take this from me.

And whispers, and everything.

I want you to tremble  
when the amber shatters  
and black bugs spill out with syrup on their  
glass wings.

I want you like the fifth caress.  
I want you like the second hour.  
I want you fearless-

and breathtaking.

# FALL AFTER SPRING

Amy Lam

I'm back! I wrote this as a quiz grade for my English class! When my teacher gave me back my sonnet, she wrote tons of awesome comments on the paper. I was touched. She even stopped me after class and asked if I write a lot ^^" I told her I did and she told me to continue writing as the one I wrote was well done.

So now, I want you all to read this too! I hope you all enjoy this!! The first line is really inspired by "Feeling Good" the song. From there, words just came to me. The rhyming part was a bit hard, but I love the piece after I was finished.

I hope you all enjoy this piece and comment/review/favorite it here: <http://blacktealways.deviantart.com/art/Fall-after-Spring-372864205>

Enjoy. :)

Blue birds have no minds to fly high.

I go and hide behind the white smoke,  
my breath caught within my throat.

Oh the limit of their blue sky.

Black butterflies go by and by,  
my good-byes covered with a black cloak.

Hoping it's all just a joke,  
as tears fall from my eye.

Yes this is not a fair dream.

Like cocktails without vermouth,  
and honey without dew,

finally here is the truth:

There is no world without you.

Beauty left us with just ruth.

25/04/2013 2:35 AM.

Kela Lewis-Morin

If you like what you read please feel free to follow me on twitter

<https://twitter.com/KelaLewisMorin>

or check out my blog for more of my work

<http://kelalewis-morin.deviantart.com/>

I didn't get the chance to say good night to her before bed.  
Instead when I finished writing I planted one on her forehead.  
She shudders under the covers and smothers towards me.  
The blind smile on her face shows me that she really adorns me.  
I place my cheek on her cheek  
And my hand on her sleek physique.  
My other rests on her chest to feel her heart beat.  
She clasps her lips and thrusts her arm over me  
As I begin thinking this feels like how it is supposed to be  
And how this girl can still inspire me to write poetry.  
I lean closer to stare into her fluttering eye lids.  
Imagining an occupied hand crafted crib in my crib.  
I then kiss her lifeless and adrift muttering lips.  
Pressing my digits in between her quivering finger tips.  
I pluck and tuck her stray hairs behind her ear.  
Wondering what did I do to deserve to be here.  
For her to wake up and not know the hours I spent gazing.  
Or her album of songs that I can never stop repeatedly praising.  
Or even be aware of the uncomfortable position I forcibly lay in.  
Just so I was still able to be facing  
In her unscheduled shifting direction.  
So I can conclude my nightly inspection  
And reinterpret her perfect imperfections.  
Regardless to whether she maybe awake or not.  
I will lie there fully satisfied with the lady that I have got.  
My last thought will always be that I love this girl a hell of a lot.