

The Combine of Sin

By Astri

Submitted: May 9, 2006
Updated: November 8, 2006

A fanfiction about Jipha, the green-haired villain from the Bistal story arc of Maze: The Mega-Burst Space, and why he became the villain he is. Shorter than my previous fanfics, by the way...

Provided by Fanart Central.

<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/Astri/32962/The-Combine-of-Sin>

Chapter 1 - The Combine of Sin

2

1 - The Combine of Sin

Disclaimers: Here are the things that do not belong to me: Jipha; the Jaina Holy Group; the Bartonian Empire; the kingdom of Bistal; the Jainan commander Chic; Princess Mill Varna; and Maze. All other things and people—even down to things like Sir Keremil, the Word of Jaina, and the geography of the entire world—are mine.

Explanation of the Insanity: This is just a little story I had the random idea for while watching the Bistal story arc of Maze: The Mega-Burst Space. I watched it during the day when I was sick, then wrote this all that night on pure spontaneity. There was something about the villain, Jipha, that struck an odd chord in me. Rarely do I get the feeling that a villain must have had a tragic past, when that past is not shown. But in Jipha's case, I had the sudden hunch that there was indeed some kind of horror in his past that was the reason for his involvement with the evil Jaina Holy Group. Insanity or clairvoyance, whatever it was, here I present it to you.

The Combine of Sin

Far to the west of the empire of Bartonian beyond the Hills of Forbe, across the Methanis River and south of the Kikaden Mountains, there lie the Great Plains of Shim. And over a decade ago, there was on these plains a small village called Krist.

Krist was not far from the kingdom of Terena, one of the Bartonian empire's allied kingdoms, but it was not a part of that land. Its only connection to Terena was the coincidental fact that Krist happened to have been built only a few hours' walk away from one of Terena's largest demi-armor excavation sites. Since the site was technically within Krist's jurisdiction, as it was outside of Terena's boundaries, the King of Terena and the Chief of Krist had come to an agreement—Krist allowed Terena to mine its demi-armors, and Terena respected Krist's own boundaries and kept its work a safe distance away.

At this time, the word of the Jaina Holy Group had already insinuated itself into the lands beyond the sight of the Bartonian empire. Even in Krist, so close to the relative safety of Terena, Jaina was whispering, letting its poisonous words and scriptures drip into the ears of any who might listen. But despite their subtly-lurking presence—embodied in full by a white-robed priest of Jaina, who resided in the town and made his living by proclaiming the Word of Jaina outside his home every morning until noon—the Jaina Holy Group as yet had little influence in the placid town of Krist.

As yet.

* * *

“E-YAAAAAAAAAAHHHH!!!”

Sai's battle cry sliced through the air like a blade of the finest honed steel as his foot sliced beneath it and slammed the leather ball forward. Fast as a bird in flight, the ball streaked through the air and pounded the net so hard it bounced back and smacked the goalie in the back of the head—an inanimate reprimand for letting it in to score Sai's team the winning goal.

The other boys on Sai's team cheered loudly and went into various renditions of a victory dance. Sai roared as loudly as the rest of them, reaching up with one hand to push his elbow-length raven hair away from his face. His opponents let out various groans or curses, although they hadn't really expected it to go any differently. Sai was unbeatable at this game.

The ball-beaned goalie got to his feet, rubbing his emerald hair ruefully. "Want to take it easy on me next time, Sai?"

Sai beamed infectiously. "Sorry, Jipha. But, mmm...let me see...nah, no, not really...I mean, where's the fun in letting you go, huh?"

"Get over it, Jipha!" Russen shouted, grabbing Sai by the shoulder. "You get him next time anyways, no complaining this time around! C'mon, I'm so sweaty I'm turning dirt into mud. River, people!"

"Not me, not right now," Jipha waved. "My sis needs me to get something for her."

"Your sister is a slave driver," Russen complained. "You haven't gone swimming after a game with us in forever."

"Yeah, well...just have fun without me, 'k?" Jipha pulled off his leather arm- and leg-guards and tossed them to Sai. "See you all later."

* * *

Jipha returned to his house, cast a few looks around to make sure nobody was watching, and squirreled up into the nearest tree until he was hidden by thick foliage almost the same color as his hair. He felt like a ball of sweat squashed into humanoid form, but he had to wait here until his friends were done with the river. Or at least, until Sai was done with the river.

Just thinking Sai's name was enough this time. The blood came to his cheeks, turning golden-brown to dark raspberry, and to the rest of his body lower down, pressing him uncomfortably against his sweat-soaked clothes. His heartbeat slammed suddenly in his ears, fluttering blindly inside his chest...

Jipha raked his fingers into his spiky emerald hair and fisted them there, digging his nails into his palms, trying to concentrate on the pain of cutting nails and pulling hairs rather than the heat spreading throughout his entire body.

Stop thinking about it, he told himself savagely. Stop thinking about him. You've been thinking about him this way for over a month now, and you're just being sick and unnatural. He's just a friend. That's all he is, that's all he'll ever be, that's all you really want him to be. Father Corolones talks about how wrong it is to think you want something more than that. It's just misdirected energies. Focus, idiot, focus! It's not real! It's just you being stupid!!

His body was not convinced, but it agreed to fake it for a little while. His pulse began to slow back towards a more normal rate, letting blood circulate through his ears instead of banging like his sister when she was taking her anger out on the kitchen door. He let his hands slide out of his hair, the palms now marked with ten tiny crescent-shaped bites.

Misdirected energies. Yeah. That's all. It's just combining sins to let yourself get caught up in fake passion like that. This. Whatever. Get over it. Stop thinking about it.

He couldn't help wondering why he had to seclude himself in a tree while his friends splashed in the river if this passion was fake.

Some kind of God-ordered penance? Father Corolones would probably know. He reflected on that for a moment. But like hell am I gonna ask...he'd probably make me recite the Exaltation of God for the rest of my life if I told him about this...

A sudden fiery vision of Sai's sport-hardened brown muscles brought the blood back to his face.

Maybe I should anyways...

* * *

Jipha snuck glances up and down the river, looking first east towards the Terenan excavation site on the horizon, then west towards the sun setting above the peaked roof of the Kristan Chief's house. It

was late, near to moonrise, and all of the other boys were home now. Generally, the people of Krist rose and fell with the sun. Jipha was probably one of the few out of his home right now.

Shimmering tangerine rays caressed his skin as he unlaced his shirt and trousers, setting the leather garments in the river beneath a flat stone so the water could rinse the sweat out. Clad only in his loincloth, he lowered himself into the river with a quiet sigh. It was getting cold, but he was used to that, seeing as he hadn't been able to let himself use the river at the same time as the rest of his friends for over a month now.

"Gotcha!"

Jipha yelped, lost his balance, and fell face-first into the river. When he finally regained his footing and got his head above the surface again, spouting water like a gargoyle, he found himself face-to-knees with Sai, perched on a rock, raven hair pulled back with a leather tie, smiling slightly down at him.

"I told the others I was gonna wait and ambush you, because I knew your sister'd never let you go the day without a bath," Sai explained, "but I wasn't expecting to wait this long. I almost gave up and went home. What took you?"

"Took me?!" Jipha was about to release a tirade about people who almost made other people drown themselves when he realized—really realized—that Sai was only wearing as much as he was. Which sidetracked him somewhat.

"You never swim with us anymore," Sai remarked. "And you hang out with us less and less lately, too. What's up? It's like you don't like us anymore or something."

"Don't—oh, no! That's not it!" Jipha cursed himself thoroughly. He couldn't have waited just a few more minutes until Sai had given up and gone home, could he have? "No, I'm just...really busy. Lately."

"Busy with what?" Sai demanded.

"Stuff my sister—"

"It's not your sister." Sai slid down the side of his rock into the water and pushed himself through the river up to Jipha. "You don't do half the things you tell us you do for your sister. I've asked around. You haven't been at Marlia's bakery for two weeks, and you told us you went there for your sister five days ago. Same kind of story with the trading post, Miss Farla, Father Corolannes...what have you been doing that you're running away from us so much?"

Sai paused, then asked bluntly, "Is it a girl?"

"No!" Jipha couldn't believe this. Couldn't Russen or Alix have decided to wait up for him, or anybody else aside from Sai? "No! There's absolutely, definitely, no girl involved!"

"Then why are you blushing?"

Oh, dammit, so Sai could even tell. "I...it's..."

"What?" Sai was fixing him with his gaze as though on a sword, making Jipha squirm. "What is it?"

"Sai...it's..."

Without thinking, Jipha reached up and braced his fingers against the hard mahogany of Sai's chest, as though trying to push him away. He could perhaps have gotten away with it had he completed the motion, shoved Sai away, made even some kind of a token push. But the moment his fingers touched Sai's bare skin, he realized they had touched Sai's bare skin, and he snatched them away, his face igniting with shame.

Sai blinked. Then he blinked again. He looked down at his own chest, as though expecting to see some kind of repulsive swamp creature perched there. Then he looked back at Jipha. And slow comprehension dawned on his face.

No!! Jipha wanted to scream, seeing the connection click in Sai's dark eyes. Don't think about it! Don't figure it out!

Sai, older by a year and standing on a higher slant than Jipha, bent his knees until he, like Jipha, was immersed up to his nipples in water.

“Jipha,” Sai whispered, his voice much gentler than Jipha had expected it to be, “is this it?”

His fingers, river-cold and dripping water, floated to the river’s surface, and pressed themselves against Jipha’s heart.

Jipha’s heartbeat was so loud he was sure Sai could have heard it before he touched his chest.

Sai’s touch swept away all barriers in Jipha’s mind, all thoughts of Father Corolannes’ scriptures, all worries of right or wrong in his mind or anyone else’s. A thousand binding ropes of fear and hesitation burned into ashes and were gone—Jipha pushed himself up against the skin he had just touched and kissed Sai on the mouth, and Sai slipped his arms around Jipha’s golden shoulders and kissed him back like the sun, hot and blinding and brilliant, searing every nerve with fire.

They fell out of the river together on the opposite shore from Krist; and it was a good thing that all the villagers of Krist were in for the night, for had any been out for an evening stroll, they might have seen an act of love so searingly pure that their eyes would have burned as if they had looked into the sun.

* * *

“And the Apostles gazed upon their fallen brethren, and as one they raised their eyes to the heavens and implored, ‘Why, O Lord? Why hath thou brought thine Judgment upon these, our fellow men?’ And lo, God sent unto them an Oracle, who proclaimed, ‘Nay, call these not your fellow men, for these were but creatures possessed by the Seven Sins. For though even men are not proof from the Sins of Vanity, Sloth, Anger, Gluttony, Envy, Desire, and Longing, it must be death when two Sins doth thou combine. For to plant more than one type of seed in one field is not only Sloth, but Gluttony; and to craft clothing from more than one type of material is not only Vanity, but Longing; and to lust for one of the same sex is not only Desire, but Envy. Protect thyself from the combine of Sin and you remain safe from the Lord’s Judgment.’ And the Apostles asked of the Oracle, ‘How may we protect ourselves from the combine of Sin, and remain pure in God’s Judgment?’ And the Oracle replied, ‘By means of the Word of the Lord, which he hath set for you here, in stone...’”

Jipha didn’t even notice the acidic look Father Corolannes shot at him as he raced down the street, dodging around and through the small crowd of people who had gathered to listen to another chapter of the Word of Jaina. The old Father disapproved of anything that dared to interrupt his reading of his sacred text, but today Jipha couldn’t have cared less. Sai was waiting for him across the river.

Why doesn’t it bother me anymore? Jipha wondered, sprinting across the field to the river. Why don’t I care what Father Corolannes says anymore?

Not bothering to remove his clothes for a drier crossing, Jipha jumped into the river, sending up a massive plume of spray which enveloped him like a cloud. He waded purposefully across, spitting water out of his mouth as he went.

Is it because now that Sin has possessed me, I’m against the right thing?

Jipha entertained this thought only as long as it took him to clamber over a particularly large rock. No. It can’t be. I’ve never felt more right than with Sai. Sai and I are totally right. I know it.

Emerging from the water like a slick brown seal, shedding water from leather and skin and dripping emerald hair, Jipha made his way up the grassy slope of the riverbank into the scattered trees and bushes just beyond. Although trees were somewhat rare on the Great Plains of Shim, these tight little clusters of them, knitted together by undergrowth and called “bluffs” by the Kristans, were not exactly uncommon, either. They offered the perfect shelter for sweating children in the summer, irritated walkers in the rains...or secret lovers in the search for privacy.

Jipha forged his way out of the bluff by the river and struck out across the Great Plains towards another bluff, almost a mile distant and much safer a meeting place than the one by the river. Although it was not a hard walk and it was still relatively early morning, by the time Jipha reached the trees again

his clothes were almost dried, and he was on the verge of sweating.

The young boy stole into the trees until they opened before him, unveiling a small clearing sprinkled with wild violets. Leaning out into the open, Jipha called softly, "Sai?"

No answer.

I guess I'm here first, Jipha thought, creeping out into the clearing. Although there was nobody around, he still felt the urge to be secretive. Unless I mixed up the day, or the time, or—

"YAAAAAAAHH!!!"

Jipha screamed as something blasted down out of a tree at him like a cannonball, landing against his neck and knocking him heavily to the ground. Raven curtains fell across his face and shoulders, stained by the rising scent of crushed violets.

"Sai!!!!"

Sai collapsed against Jipha's shoulder, whooping with laughter. "Your face! You almost died!"

"Almost?!" Jipha's heart was still going a mile a minute. "I'm not sure I didn't!!"

"Oh, come on." Sai pushed himself up until his face was above Jipha's, his long hair falling loose about them both, chest still shaking with laughter. "It was classic. You know you liked it."

Jipha huffed. "Liked it?! I think you deserve a long, painful, agonizing death for it!!"

Sai started to reply: and Jipha lunged upwards and seized his open mouth in a rough, deep, carnal kiss. Sai lost his words in an inarticulate gasp, and his breath, sweet with the scent of the sap gum he chewed when he was bored, flowered across Jipha's tongue.

The kiss lasted an eternity, or forty-seven seconds, whichever one it took for Sai to break away, panting for air. "Jipha—"

"Be quiet," Jipha said recklessly, grabbing Sai by the shoulders and pulling him back down. "I'm trying to suffocate you. Painfully and agonizingly."

Their mouths met again, connecting the two lovers like a brilliant diamondic bridge.

"Not agonizing yet," Sai murmured.

"No? Let me try—"

The word "harder" was sliced off into a lingering moan as Sai slid his hands beneath the waistband of the green-haired boy's trousers. Jipha slid his hands across the muscles of Sai's chest and undid the lacing of his shirt with fingers made clumsy by desire, pulling it open and off his shoulders. Sai shifted until his weight was on his knees and let his own fingers stroke the curve of Jipha's cheek, down his throat, to his collarbones.

Something cracked.

Sai's head shot up. Jipha craned his neck to look above him as best he could.

A dark, humanoid shape froze in the trees, then sped away out to the south.

Sai wrenched himself up into a sitting position, catching his shirt as it threatened to slide completely off. "What the...?"

"What was that?" Jipha asked, twisting himself around a bit until he could see the trees where the shape had been just a few seconds before. "Was that...a person?"

"I think so," Sai muttered.

They waited, watching the trees and shadows, hardly daring to breathe—but nothing else moved. Finally Jipha let out a sigh, almost of relief. "I think it's gone, whatever it was."

"I think so...but if..." Sai shook his head uncertainly. "Jipha...maybe this isn't the best..."

"Time?" Then Jipha took a closer look at Sai's face, and felt a stab of apprehension. "Or idea?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?" Jipha felt physically wounded. "You don't know...if this is what you want?"

"That's not what I meant." Sai took a deep breath. "Jipha, if this is dangerous...if this ends up being...I don't wanna be the reason you get hurt. Because...Jipha, I think—I think that I...oh, hell...Jipha, I love

you.”

Jipha almost forgot about the shadow. He was so dazzled he almost forgot to breathe.

“You...really?” Jipha breathed. “You really...” He couldn’t repeat it. He was afraid that if he repeated it, it would prove never to have existed except in his own mind. “...like me, that much?”

Sai cupped Jipha’s face with his hand. “Jipha, I don’t like you, I love you. And I don’t give a damn what Father Corolonnes, or any of our friends, or anyone in my family says about it. But there are some people...if they knew what we felt—”

Jipha pushed himself up into a sitting position and threw his arms around Sai’s bare shoulders.

“You don’t give a damn about what Father Corolonnes says?” Jipha murmured. “Good. ‘Cause I don’t give a damn about what anybody else says. I love you too, Sai. I love you, I love you, I love you. And never, ever, am I gonna stop.”

* * *

“You are back quickly,” Sir Keremil of Jaina said coldly. “Have you already scoped out the occupation of the Tereman excavation site?”

His spy prostrated himself on the floor. “Milord, forgive me. I was seen.”

Sir Keremil’s head snapped up. “You were what?!”

“I was seen before I reached the site,” the spy confessed, “by two young boys in the trees. I might have passed unnoticed, for they seemed quite preoccupied with one another, but I made an accidental sound and they saw me. From their clothes and accents, I would say they were from Krist, not Terema...”

Sir Keremil slammed his hand against the wall. “Dammit! That doesn’t make it any better, Jeriss!! If they tell their Chief that they saw you, he’s certain to tell the Teremans—and then they’ll know that Jaina is planning to take the site!”

Jeriss flattened himself against the floor. “I am deeply sorry, milord...”

“Don’t waste your breath! Rouse the men! We must destroy this town immediately on some kind of pretense! We cannot have evidence like that lurking around!”

* * *

Jipha was asleep, sinking slowly towards the silver surface of the sea of dreams, when his door suddenly slammed open and his sister was over him, her jade hair tumbling over her shoulders, shaking him with all her strength.

“Jipha!! Hurry!! Wake up!!”

“Wuzzguinon?” Jipha mumbled incoherently, feeling his brain knocking around inside his skull from his sister’s incessant shaking. “Wuzzron?”

“Jipha, we’re being attacked!!”

Jipha woke up a little more. “Whut?!”

“The Chief’s house—hell, half the village is on fire! We have to get out of here, quickly! Come on, now, before—”

Something slammed against the door, which, Jipha suddenly noticed, had a chair balanced against its knob.

“Dammit, they’re here!” his sister moaned, looking wildly about. “Ah...the window! Hurry!”

Jipha was yanked out of bed and to the window almost before he could get his feet to the ground.

“But...we’re on the second story...”

“Never mind that!” his sister snapped, and she grabbed his sheet off the bed and threw it over the

side of the window frame, knotting it quickly to the bedpost. “Now go!”

The door was slamming against its hinges now. Now fully awake, Jipha slung himself over the side of the window frame and took a cautious step down the sheet.

His grip slipped.

Jipha plummeted the two stories and landed with a whumpf on the ground.

“OW!!”

“Are you all right?” his sister called anxiously.

“I think so,” Jipha groaned, getting to his feet rather painfully. “Be careful on your way down, sis—it’s really slipp—”

There was a resounding crash from above. Jipha’s sister glanced wildly off to the side, and screamed, a scream Jipha had never heard anything like before in his life. She lunged for the window, but hands reached out of nowhere and dragged her back.

“Arees!!!” Jipha screamed.

“Jipha, run!!” Arees screamed back, fighting to reach the window even as she was dragged inexorably backwards. “Run or I swear I’ll haunt you for the rest of your life!! Run, NOW!!!!”

Then she disappeared.

Gone like a candle flame.

* * *

Jipha ran through night-dark streets painted white with fire, ran through fallen debris surrounded by the cackling of the flames and the screams of the dying. He still had no idea who it was who was destroying his town—he saw not a living soul as he ran. Only corpses, which littered the street like cast-off ribbons.

Jipha kept his eyes straight ahead, trying not to look down at the bodies of the people he knew. His breath came in sharp sobs to his throat. His sister was dead, or dying. His parents, surely the same. The Chief, Marlia the baker, elderly Miss Farla, Russen, Alix...

His feet slowed down of their own accord.

“No,” Jipha whispered. “No.”

He knew what he was going to see. He knew whose house he was in front of. He knew who God’s Judgment had been meted out to before he even turned to look. But then he looked, and he not only knew it, but had to accept it, and that was something he could not do.

“NNNNNNNNNOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

The heat of the burning house beat against his skin like a hammer, but he didn’t care. He didn’t even notice. He seized the breathless, bloodied body of the boy he loved, and pressed his lips to the stained raven hair, his lonely breath no longer sobs but deep, racking screams, an elegy of suffering.

Why, O Lord? Why hath thou brought thine Judgment upon these, our fellow men?

“SAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

* * *

Jeriss frowned, and lifted a black-gloved hand. “Milord, that’s the other one. The other boy who saw me.”

Sir Keremil lifted his visor to get a better look. “Is it now. With the first one who saw you.”

“Yes, milord.”

“Seems very upset about his death, doesn’t he?”

“I told you, milord, they were extremely close when I saw them.”

“Indeed you did,” Sir Keremil muttered. “Disgusting. But perhaps useful.”

“Useful, milord?”

Sir Keremil slid his visor down again. “Stay back, Jeriss.”

* * *

Out of the flames loomed a sudden tall figure, dressed entirely in black mail, a huge sword naked in his hand.

Jipha shrank back, clutching Sai’s body closer to him, though whether it was to protect Sai or himself he wasn’t sure.

“Those who are hollow, foolish, and defiant shall be visited with a severe punishment from the Lord,” the apparition intoned. “God knows your sins, and has passed His Judgment upon you for them.”

Jipha’s breath caught. “You mean...this...all this...is because I...”

“You have melded the Sins of Desire and Envy in this village,” the giant said sternly. “God’s Judgment has now been passed upon it.”

If anything could put the finishing touch on Jipha’s grief and desolation, it was this. His heart felt as though this horrible black creature had taken it in his black-gloved hand and squeezed it until it burst like a rotten peach, spraying juice which dribbled out of his eyes as tears.

“If you wish to atone for your sins,” the black knight continued, “then begin by casting them behind you. Let go of that boy you shamelessly dragged down into darkness with you. Leave this village you brought the Judgment of the Lord down upon. Let the souls of all who died here find peace by taking the blame you deserve. Come with me, and give your repentance by aiding the Lord through the Jaina Holy Group.”

The words hit Jipha’s crushed heart like knives. He looked down at Sai’s face, his beautiful, wood-brown face, and saw nothing there but pain.

“I don’t wanna be the reason you get hurt.”

I did this? I killed him? It’s my fault...? Sai is dead...because of me... ..

I have to repent for him...I did this...and I have to make up for it...in any way I can...

Jipha laid Sai’s body down on the ground beside him, letting his eyes linger for one last moment on the face he had loved so much so briefly, every second sending another stab of pain through his heart. Sai...I love you...but if it was so evil that I did...

Then I wonder if maybe I shouldn’t’ve...

Jipha tore his eyes away from Sai and looked straight into the visor of the black knight in front of him, and felt his heart die in his chest.

“I will go with you.”

* * *

Over a decade later...

“Jipha,” Sir Keremil said, walking into his room without preamble, “you have a new assignment.”

The young soldier looked up at Sir Keremil with his almond-shaped Western eyes. “Yes?”

“You are to go to Bistal,” Sir Keremil said roughly. “Sir Chic has requested your presence there. You have been made Chief Commander of the Bistal Invasion Force, with the goals of destroying and annexing the kingdom of Bistal, and capturing and executing the Princess Mill Varna and her guardian, the Luminator Maze. Do you understand?”

The newly proclaimed Chief Commander casually flipped a lock of green hair up from his eyes. Destroy a country? Kill a princess? Cause more havoc and destruction?

He smiled without humor. “Of course.”