

Semper Fidelus

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Submitted: May 2, 2008
Updated: February 11, 2009

The final story of Blain and Nicole...

Provided by Fanart Central.

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1 - Once upon a time...

“Our so-called leaders... They sold us out to the furries... Destroyed our homes... Our cultures... Our honour... Our blood has been spilled on our soil... My blood... On their hands... They are the invaders... All Mobian armed forces will leave the continent... Or they shall suffer the consequences...”

“Unknown”

Running through the corridors while I carried Di-Angelo wasn't exactly an easy job... He was way taller than me and heavy, but I did my best to run as fast as I could... I tried to stop the bleeding by pressing my hand on his stomach and as I ran through the corridors, I heard him screaming in pain. It echoed throughout the dark corridors and it was bone chilling to hear... Going left... Another left... Take a right... Almost there... I kicked down the door that was in front as the others looked baffled at us... Then they saw I carried Di-Angelo... I placed him down as gentle as I could... Rico took over from me as we all stared at the golden yellow lion with light brown manes... Di-Angelo's deep baritone scream once again echoed throughout the room as Rico tried to save his life...

Saidah couldn't take it... She couldn't witness how her partner suffered like that... And truth be told, I couldn't either... His whole stomach was torn open and... There wasn't much that Rico could do. Everyone knew that he couldn't do much. The only thing Rico could do was to ease his suffering by drugging him... Di-Angelo stopped screaming and was breathing heavily as he looked at everyone... Rico placed a blanket over him to keep him warm... Then Saidah kneeled next to Di-Angelo and talked to him... Kissing him on his forehead and kept assuring him everything was alright... It was so heartbreaking... We could see he was crying... She didn't... She was strong for him as she whispered in his ear... And at some point, he passed away silently... Then she just broke out in tears and crying her eyes out as we all just looked at the two lions... And there wasn't anything we could do... Everyone wished they could have done something, but all we felt was desolation and despair... I tried picking up Saidah and took her somewhere where we could be alone... She lay down on a bed as I sat on the edge of it, and she was crying her eyes out... I gave her a long firm hug, and although I knew words wouldn't help, I stayed silent... She wanted to be alone... I scratched her behind her ear and left...

As I went back to the others, I sat down in a corner... Blain sat next to me not long after that... I looked him in the eyes and knew he was thinking the same thing... It got us thinking of how things could turn out like this... Why we were being chased down and why there was so much hate... We just didn't understand... Then all of a sudden, it was like Blain and I were traveling back in time... To figure out the

how and why...

So when did it start...? Why did it start...? Who started it...?

Now I remember. I can see it, from where I am now. I can smell it, I can feel it... I can tell the story... Because where I am right now, makes everything more sense than it was then... But... Unfortunately, that doesn't change what happened to us. Maybe it all started when we first heard the message... They were crying when it started... At first, I didn't know why they were crying, but I do now... They were crying because it had begun... For us...

I remember how the meaning of words began to change... How unfamiliar words like "collateral" and "siege" became frightening, while things like GUN and ICA became powerful... I remember being "different" became dangerous... I still don't understand it, why they hated us so much...

Robotropolis... Fifty thousand people used to live here... Now it's a ghost town...

And now you're wondering what happened to us...? I'm not sure if you really want to know. It actually happened a very long time ago... And... Quite honestly, I can't remember much of it... I'm glad I don't remember much of it... But this is something that has to be told and should not be forgotten by anyone. It's not about Blain or me, but it's about all the horrifying events that happened to everyone over the years... We've seen that in the past and present... So it wouldn't be any different in the future...

Like with all stories, you'll have to start from the very beginning... And I think you've guessed who I am. For those of you who can't remember me... My name is Blain... Thirty nine years ago, I was created to turn the events of a forsaken war, carried out by the visions of a mad man. I can tell ya, it wasn't a pretty youth. But I survived it, which came at a very high price no one is willing to pay for. I had a lot of trouble getting used to a normal life once the war was over, and I often wondered what normal people would do. Sonic and the others accepted me, and I stayed with them ever since. Then there was this girl, who changed everything. She opened my eyes and helped me a lot with the struggles I was facing. She had struggles as well. We couldn't get along at first, but due to all sorts of circumstances and events, we started to understand each other and grew closer. The things she went through wasn't the same I had, but I could relate to her in some way, and she could relate to me. And at some point, we were in love. Except we didn't know... For more then twenty three years, we lived in prosperity, and had everything we ever wanted. We were happy... Everyone... I can't exactly remember when it truly started, or why.

But, come to think of it, it doesn't matter anymore. It did, and there was nothing we could do to change it...

I woke up one night... For... No particular reason... I had a bad dream but as soon as I opened my eyes I forgot what it was about... I looked around as I lay in bed and I felt Blain breathing next to me... Asleep... As I looked down, I noticed he had his arm clenched around my stomach... I moved over and placed my hand on his cheek... And there was this ecstasy I felt myself floating away in... My whole body felt tingly and sensitive and it just didn't stop... And at some point, it felt like I was hit with a sledgehammer, and everything just stopped... I couldn't feel... I couldn't think... I didn't know where I was, or... Who I was... It took me a while to remember...

Lara-Su: Auntie...?

I was so carried away in thoughts that I didn't noticed Lara-Su was standing in the doorway. I didn't realize she stood there, until I heard her voice. I was startled at first, but then realized it was Lara-Su...

Nicole: Lara? Wh-What's wrong?

Lara-Su: I can't sleep... I didn't wake you did I...?

Nicole: No you didn't...

Lara-Su: Is it ok if I made a cup of hot coco...?

Nicole: Yeah sure, go ahead... Make one for me as well...

Lara-Su: Ok...

I sat upright on the edge of my bed as Blain continued sleeping... I looked at him at first wondering how he could sleep like that. But then again, he always slept like a baby. I got up and walked to the door to get myself to the kitchen, but suddenly, I looked at myself in the mirror on the wall. I stared myself in the eyes and realized how old I got over the years... Forty one years old... And not much changed in appearance... My body got older, but that's pretty much it. Same face, same body I had twenty three years ago. I might have grown a little and my hair might be shorter then it used to be, but that's where the differences stopped. As I stared in the mirror, I was staring myself in my own eyes... They say that the eyes are the gateways to a person's soul, and staring in someone's eyes means you're looking in someone's heart. You can see a lot when you stare in someone's eyes and I guess that's the reason why I stayed with Blain for so many years...

I smiled at myself and went on to the kitchen where Lara-Su was pouring hot water in cups. It twirled down and slowly turned brown as the water mixes up with cocoa. Then she added a little bit of sugar to make it sweeter, and as she handed a cup to me, we sat down on the couch.

Lara-Su: So... You couldn't sleep either huh?

Nicole: I just woke up... I had a bad dream but I can't remember what it was about...

Lara-Su: Ooh...

Nicole: And you? Lara-Su: I don't know, I just can't sleep...

Nicole: Is something wrong?

Lara-Su: Kinda...

Nicole: What's up?

Lara-Su: I'm just wondering when my parents will be home you know... I mean, they said it only took a week, but their gone for more then two weeks now...

Nicole: They called yesterday...

Lara-Su: Yeah I know but... What if something happened back there?

Nicole: Hey...

I stroked my hand through her Crimson red hair... Look at her... She's all grown up now... Fifteen years young she is... Knuckles and Julie-Su are very proud of her. So were Blain and I. She always protects the kids who get bullied at school. Well, she's the daughter of Knuckles, so what do you expect? She had a few talks with the principal and even got suspended once, but it was never in her disadvantage. She was never the one who started the fight. Most of the time she's just shy and keeps herself in the background, but whenever she sees something she can't stand, she'll do everything about it to set it right. Sometimes that led to conflicts but she's a fast learner. Knuckles and Julie-Su had a lot of talks with her, and so did Blain and I. We grew really close with Lara-Su. She was four years old when we got acquainted, and she changed a lot over the years... We saw her growing up like she was our own daughter, but I never forgot my own daughter who died a long time ago... She'd be 6 years old now, and although there isn't a single day that goes by without thinking of Kaelyn, it still pains me...

As to the question of why Lara-Su is here, Knuckles and Julie-Su received word a few weeks ago that things weren't going smooth on Angel Island. It had something to do with his dad and all that, I don't really know. I guess we'll hear the story once they get back. Knuckles and Julie-Su didn't want Lara to be involved in the situation on Angel Island and they also didn't want her to be home alone, so they asked if Lara could stay over for a week. I didn't mind. Of course not. In fact, I love having her around.

Nicole: You shouldn't worry about things like that... I heard Sonic telling lots of stories of your dad breaking out of situations-

Lara-Su: Well, it's not that...

Nicole: Then what is it...?

Lara-Su: I overheard them talking a few weeks ago...

Nicole: About what...?

Lara-Su: That's the thing... I don't know. Dad sounded really mad...

Nicole: I guess there isn't much use to think about if you don't know what it's all about. We'll all hear the story once they get home... Don't worry...

Lara-Su: Yeah... *takes sip*

I took sips from my hot coco as I noticed a newspaper on the table and got hold of it... "The Liberty Tree". It said on the frontpage that 431 humans were killed in riots. What got me was a picture of a human carrying a wounded kid as you can see MNAF soldiers in the background guiding civilians to safer grounds. As I turned page, the story continued...

So what happened over the years you might ask? Well, there was this group of humans, who didn't like the idea being ruled by a bunch of animals, or furies as they refer to us ever since the war ended 28 years ago. Maybe it's because their too proud to be helped by us, or maybe it's because they think their superior over us. Whatever it is, they didn't like it. While some humans received our help with open arms, some didn't. Whatever it was, they never could establish a peaceful society. They lacked leadership. Well there was a leader, but got assassinated a long time ago. Yes, I'm talking about Robotnik. As to this day, no one knows who was behind the hit on Robotnik, and although the ICA and GUN investigated the case, it never got solved. The ICA was more like secret police as GUN was a military organisation founded after the war was over. Stories about ICA and GUN went around saying they tortured their suspects in order to get some information out of them. But it all led to a dead end. As the years passed by, the humans started to turn against GUN and ICA because of their actions against civilians. The only excuse GUN and the ICA had for those violent actions was because "order" must be restored. But it did the opposite. Riots broke out who got heavier over the years and the remaining countries were afraid it might lead to another war again because the first war also started like that. So we send the Mobian National Armed Forces over there to contain the situation and helped rebuilding their country. But like I said, some received the help with open arms, and some didn't. Shooting and killing and explosions are part of every day life over there, and I don't wanna live there... And that's the story so far for the humans in a nutshell... Sure there were other things happening in the world, but this was the most important conflict. I'm glad it happened thousands of miles away...

Nicole: ... "431 humans killed in Sarophina"

Lara-Su: It just never stops for them is it...?

Nicole: It's awful...

Lara-Su: I don't get it... I mean... Why don't they just put down their weapons and think about their problems? That would make a whole lot more sense then shooting each others brains out...

Nicole: I have no idea...

The next morning I woke up slowly as the sun was shining in my face. I didn't notice it at first, but Nicole wasn't lying next to me. So I got up, and took a shower. Seeing as it was still 11 am, and my stomach was rumbling, I made some breakfast. I didn't see Nicole or Lara-Su once I got to the livingroom. And there they were asleep on the couch with two mugs on the table. One was half full with hot coco. Well it wasn't hot anymore, that's for sure. As I looked around the kitchen to see if there was anything to eat, I came across all sorts of stuff. Milk, eggs, pancake batter mix, and all that. Pancakes didn't sound too bad. Although I never made pancakes in my entire

life. But I've seen Nicole doing it, and it didn't look that hard to do. Also, it had instructions. Nothing could go wrong right? Milk, a few eggs, pour it in a bowl with a little bit of water with the mix, then stir the frack out of it. I did it all by hand, and although we got an electric mixer, I didn't use it. Last time I used it was... Well, let's just say it didn't go to great. I'm a sucker when it comes to electrical things... But I think you already knew. Ok, next up, a stick of butter in a frying pan. Pour some of the batter in the frying pan... Then turn over regularly... I was so happy once I made my very first pancake. You think I'm joking?! Hell no. Seriously, I was grinning from ear to ear as I placed the first pancake on a plate. And not long after that, Nicole and Lara-Su entered the kitchen looking very sleepy...

Lara-Su: Morning...

Blain: 'Lo Lara!

Nicole: ...

Blain: Morning sunshine! *pinches Nicole's cheeks*

Nicole: Pah...

Lara-Su: What's that smell?

Blain: You're upper-lip, my dear.

Lara-Su: Hehehe...

Nicole: You're making pancakes?!

Blain: Look!

Then he shoved a plate in front of our nose with only one pancake on it... Lara-Su and I looked at each other and clapped our hands in a rather nonchalant way...

Blain: I know, I know. I'm a master chef.

Lara-Su: Could you do that thing what they do on television?!

Blain: Television?

Lara-Su: Yeah! Like those cooking shows! Flipping it without a spatula!

Blain: You mean flipping it up?

Lara-Su: Yeah!

Blain: Ok watch this.

Then he flips it up. Except the batter wasn't even half done yet so most of it lands next to the stove. And as I looked up, there were splatters of batter on the ceiling as it dripped in the frying pan...

Blain: I guess that one wasn't half done yet- OW!!!

And as he placed the frying pan back on the stove, he burned his hand. He lowered his hand quickly, but by doing that, he hit the handle of it, which caused it to fall down and to launch the batter that was still in it... It splatters against the kitchen window...

Later on that day, Knuckles came back along with Julie-Su. Knuckles wasn't looking too happy and after they both greet Nicole and Lara-Su and the others, Knuckles nodded to me to come over...

Blain: 'Sup?

Knuckles: How much do you still know about military operations?

Blain: Not much actually. I've been out of that for more then 23 years now...

Knuckles: shoot...

Blain: Why, what's wrong?

Knuckles: Let's go for a walk.

Blain: Ok...

So we walked off... Knuckle's face was all serious and he had that little frown he always has when he's pissed... Something must be seriously wrong...

Blain: Wassup?

Knuckles: You know how the situation up north is right...?

Blain: What, with the GUN and ICA?

Knuckles: Yeah.

Blain: Yeah, I know. Go on.

Knuckles: Angel Island is mobilizing troops.

Blain: Whadda ya mean?

Knuckles: Mobilizing, as in, gathering people.

Blain: Troops for what?

Knuckles: Don't you get it?

Blain: Dude, what the hell are you talking about?! You're not making any sense!

Knuckles: *sighs*

Blain: Ok, just... Calm down, and tell me what's going on...

Knuckles: Angel Island is located close by with the northern continent... Their mobilizing troops to defend Angel Island...

Blain: Just encase?

Knuckles: Just encase.

Blain: Then what's the problem?

Knuckles: Something is not right over there...

Blain: Like what?

Knuckles: GUN visited Angel Island...

Blain: ... What?

Knuckles: Yeah. Nothing was happening on a large scale. But according to them, the assassination on Robotnik was done by a furrie.

Blain: One of us?

Knuckles: They say they have reason to believe it was a furrie.

Blain: Any casualties?

Knuckles: No, luckily not.

Blain: What the hell are they doing there?

Knuckles: I don't know. That's the thing. They didn't seem hostile though. But how much can they do without violating any rights...?

Blain: Well not much. If the government of Angel Island gave them permission to look around, then that's the only thing they can do, which no citizen of Angel Island can stop. Their just gathering intel for the assassination. Those armed forces you saw probably went along for security and make sure nothing gets leaked. GUN and ICA aren't the most conventional organisations, but their on our side. They try to keep order over there and they are being backed up by the MNAF army.

Knuckles: I don't trust this, not one bit...

Blain: Why is everyone acting so paranoid the last couple of weeks? It's been like that for more then 8 years and now everyone starts to worry? Come on... I think you're overreacting a bit...

Knuckles: Maybe... But I just don't trust what's happening back on Angel Island...

Blain: Hehehe... Come on, let's go back. I think you're daughter wants to see you.

Like with all major conflicts, it seems innocent at first. This happens, that happens, and all of a sudden, you're in the middle of a fracking war. It all goes so fast... Except this one went so slow, everyone forgot... It would still take about 2 years before it really got serious...

...

In the mean time, I'm gonna eat some pancakes...

2 - Back in action

Like I said, nothing happened for us the first two years. But lots of things happened for the humans. After years of unrest, it finally seems to calm down... Humans got to vote for a new government and all sorts of political parties were founded. I didn't really follow their political activities, but there was one party that had ideas to preserve animals and to protect them. I didn't think they were talking about us, but still. I can actually imagine someone walking next to me to preserve me from any danger. There were other parties as well, but one of them was standing out from the others. It had these ideas Robotnik had a long time ago, and basically, the party was founded by Robotnik followers. They believe that humans are supposed to be the dominant species on the planet. And that was actually a very wrong move... Or very clever, if you look at the situation from their side...

Now, talking about us furies who ought to be annihilated and crushed under a human's boot, didn't go to well with us. Some humans didn't agree with it either, but they were in minority and thus neglected. Basically, what happened was two sides were forming. One that supported the ideas of us furies that ought to be annihilated and the other one, where they believed we could all live in peace. And as the years go by, and the situation became restless again because of political intervention, more and more people got those ideas as they spread their propaganda and stuff. It was also rumoured that every political activist that was against them got rounded up by the ICA... And to make it worse, every new political person who seems to get more powerful never got heard of again... They just "disappeared" and sometimes was confirmed that they were assassinated by some "disgruntled" guy...

And as for us... Well, not much didn't changed. I got a letter saying I had to join the army. It didn't have anything to do with my past, because I was just an average furrie to them. I was reluctant at first, because I didn't want to go back. But it was either the army or to end up in prison for refusing duty. And seeing as we were only a small community, I was the only one that had to go... Hell, it's only for two years... And every weekend I'll be home...

The first few months were rather harsh. I really needed to get in shape again and get used to all those things. It wasn't really a problem getting used to that lifestyle, but the difficult things were more of the memories I had. Well, and seeing I was a very short guy, I got bullied. Most of the time they wanted to fight me, to see how I would react so I just bashed them senseless. Slowly but steady, I grew a reputation. People started to respect me. But that also got me into a lot of trouble... I even stood in front of the court marshal, because I punched a senior officer... I started out as a humble soldier but got promoted... Private first class... Corporal... And eventually, sergeant again, like my old title... And not long after that, I got my own regiment under my

command... The 506th regiment... I remember when I met these guys for the very first time... Like it was yesterday... Fresh new recruits straight of academy... They all stand in a single line as I walked by and looked at them one by one...

Blain: My name is Gunnery Sergeant Blain, commander of the 506th regiment!! From now on, you will only speak when spoken to!! And the first words and last words out of your filthy maggot infested pie-holes will be "sir"!! Do you turds understand that?!!

All: Sir, yes sir!!

Blain: Bullshoot!!! I can't hear you!!

All: Sir, yes sir!!!

Blain: I am hard, so you will not like me! But the more you hate me the more you will learn! There is no racial separation here! I do not look down on echidna's, foxes, armadillo's, or whatever the hell you're supposed to be!! Here you are all equally worthless!! And my orders are to separate all the son of a doges who do not pack the gear to serve in my beloved regiment!! Do you understand?!!

All: Sir, yes, sir!!

Blain: Bullshoot, I can't hear you!!

All: Sir, yes, sir!!!

Then I stood in front of one of them and looked him straight in the eyes as I got my head very close to his...

Blain: What is your name?!!

Armadillo: Tavish sir!!

Blain: Are you nervous private Tavish?!!

Tavish: No sir!!

Blain: Do I MAKE you nervous private Tavish?!!

Tavish: No sir!!

Blain: Good!! I like you!! From now on, you are my favourite turd!!

Tavish: Thank you sir!!

Then I walked by the others, and at some point, I noticed crumbs on the floor... I looked at the guy who stood in front of the crumbs... Echidna...

Blain: You, step forward.

So he stepped forwards...

Blain: What is your name?

Echidna: Ezran, sir!!

Blain: Ezran... Right. Now get down on your knees.

Echidna: Excuse me sir?!

Blain: Get down on your knees you pathetic excuse for a lifeform!!!

He got down on his knees. I grabbed his head moved it closer to the ground...

Blain: Are these your crumbs?!!

Ezran: Sir yes sir!!

Blain: What were you eating private?!!

Ezran: A sandwich sir!!

Blain: And why the hell would you eat a sandwich?!!

Ezran: Because I got hungry sir!!

Blain: You got more of these?!!

Ezran: Sir, yes sir!!

Blain: Get out the sandwiches.

So he got out two more sandwiches...

Blain: Right. As you all may know, private Ezran is hungry. Eating in barracks is prohibited, but seeing as private Ezran is hungry, I shall let it slip this one time!! So while he eats up his sandwiches, the others are gonna have a lil' exercise!!! Drop and gimme 50!!! Private Ezran, enjoy your sandwiches!!

Ezran: S-Sir?!

Blain: You heard me!! You're telling me you are neglecting a direct order?!!

Ezran: No sir!!

Blain: Then get to it!!

So the others got down and I made them do push-ups...

Blain: One!! Don't you feel dumb!! Two!! Look at you!! Three!! This is a fun place to be!! Four!! I don't know what rhymes with four, but I don't give a frack!!

And as Ezran sat on his bed eating his sandwiches as I ordered, the others glared at him...

Hehehe... I made them do a total of 50 push-ups. After they were finished...

Blain: Did it taste good private Ezran?!!

Ezran: Sir, yes sir!!

Blain: Good!! Because the next time I see you eating in the barracks I'll make you clean toilettes with your tongue until you cant taste the difference between shoot and fried chicken!! Do I make myself clear private Ezran?!!

Ezran: Sir, yes sir!!

Well I was harsh on those guys, but also rewarded them when they did something good. But if one fracked up, the whole regiment fracked it up and I made them pay for one guy's mistake. That is the only way for them to learn and to learn how to work in a team. And every time I got back home, I totally switched. I wasn't a mean son of a dog when I got home. Nicole noticed I changed, but not that dramatically. Maybe it wasn't such a bad idea at all to join the army...

And as the months passed by, I got to know these guys. I got word that we were one of the most disciplined regiment in the army, and I was proud of those guys...

Although it was in the middle of the summer, it was still a pretty cold night... I waited patiently for more then eight hours in the bushes... The guys next to me and behind me were a bit nervous, and to be honest, I was nervous as well... For more then eight hours, we didn't talk. Only communicated with hand gestures... You could feel the tension in the air... Sweat drops poured off my forehead and what's worse was that a twig was poking my @\$@ and itching like hell. I couldn't move... If we were discovered, the consequences would be severe... Slowly I tried crawling forward just to get rid of the damn twig in my butt...

We've set up an ambush and we're waiting for an enemy squad to come through... Weapons ready, locked and loaded, patiently waiting... After countless of times looking through my scope, I finally spotted them in the distance. I gestured to the others that they had to prepare...

About half an hour later, we could hear them... They came from the open grass plains and entered the woods... The location we picked was of strategic importance, seeing as it was on a hill... A perfect place for an ambush... They got closer and closer... And at some point, we could actually feel their heart beating... I gestured to the others to wait. Slowly, but steady, they came closer... We became more nervous as they got closer to our position... I gestured the others to pull off the safety of their weapons, but not to engage...

At some point, I could see the shoelaces of one of them. Then I gestured to the others to slowly stand up while aiming at them... We got up slowly, and turns out I was facing the enemy's sergeant while aiming my weapon at him as the others stood up and surrounded the group...

Blain: Bang...

Sorento: Sergeant Lennox!!!

Lennox: Sir!!

Sorento: You just lost 90% of your entire squad!! Get back your @\$\$ back to the rendezvous point and start over!!

Lennox: Yes sir!!

Sorento: Sergeant Blain?

Blain: Yes sir?

Sorento: Dismiss your regiment.

Blain: The 506th is dismissed!!

Then there were lots of cheers and laughing. Everyone was very relieved it was over, but also that we managed to beat the other team without losing one of our guys...

Sorento: One hell of a job sergeant.

Blain: Thank you sir, but it was Tavish who arrange the set up.

Sorento: Tavish?

Blain: Yes sir.

Sorento: Bring him up front.

Blain: Yes sir. Tavish!! Front in center!!

Then Tavish ran towards and saluted.

Tavish: Tavish reporting in as ordered sir.

Sergeant: Captain Sorento wants to have a word with you.

Sorento: At east. You arranged that ambush?

Tavish: Yes sir.

Sorento: I see... That would be one hell of an ambush if you did that in a combat situation. You'd be actually saving a lot of lives.

Tavish: Yes sir, well, it's actually an act of common sense... Sir.

Sorento: That's what it's all about Tavish. Common sense. I've been keeping an eye on you lately. Sergeant?

Blain: Yes sir?

Sorento: See if you can arrange something for the kid.

Then I looked at him and he nodded. I knew what he meant.

Blain: Yes sir!

Sorento: Dismissed.

We both saluted the captain as he walked away...

Tavish: Sir?

Blain: What is it?

Tavish: What did the captain mean by that?

Blain: What he meant was that I should congratulate you.

Tavish: I'm promoted... Sir?

Blain: Sorento is very picky when it comes to that. And I believe him when he says you're the right guy for the job. So congratulations... Corporal...

If faces could express in words, there'd be not enough words. His eyes were all sparkly as a big grin covered the armadillo's muzzle. He saluted with a big grin.

Blain: Dismissed. Get yourself a hot shower and get some shut eye.

Tavish: Yes sir.

Blain: Oh and Tavish?

Tavish: Sir?

Blain: Don't drop the bar of soap like last time. Rico might get the wrong idea.

Tavish: Hoo-ah sir.

Then he walked off while I could hear him laughing...

**And that's how I got my corporal... He's like a second leader under my command. Good kid...
Twenty one years old...**

Now there was only one thing bothering those guys... They see I had those scars, and knew I had a bionic arm. I told them I was in the first war, but not what my true purpose was. They didn't know I was with the RRTS. And they kept on guessing and guessing but never got it right. So to make it interesting, we made a pot. Every month, they placed 25 dinar in the pot,

and whoever guesses it first wins everything. So far, 425 dinar is in the pot, and they still didn't guess it.

And that's basically what I've been doing these 2 years...

One day, we received the first word... I was so shocked by that, that I didn't know how to bring it to the guys... But I had to... I heard it when I got summoned to the major's quarter to be informed of the current situation... And I can tell it wasn't good news... I saluted the major and headed back to the barracks where everyone else waited...

On the way to the barracks, I still couldn't believe it... Did I hear it right...? I guess so... I saw my own hand shaking... I took a deep breath before I opened the door...

Argento: Attention on deck!!

They all stood up and saluted as I walked through...

Blain: As you were.

Vaux: 'Sup Sarge? Not something bad is it?

Blain: I'm afraid it is.

Forza: What is it...?

So I prepared myself to bring the news. I looked around and sighed, as they all were a bit nervous of what ever it is I'm about to tell...

Blain: At 06:23 this morning, we lost contact with our outpost near the border. These guys were stationed on high alert, and it seems they were being attacked. No one knows who was behind the attack, and apparently, there are no survivors. Satellite photos indicate that the humans are preparing a Titan armada and the current situation is very foggy at this point. We will be send out to take control of the situation and we're being stationed on high alert. We do however, got the order to shoot on sight if hostiles are converging on our location and are not complying.

I've seen a lot over the years but, telling you someone to risk their life for someone else is something that is really hard to do. The look on their faces said a lot... It stayed quiet for a while...

Blain: We'll be going next Monday. At 01:00 hours, we will be shipped out by Titan. The 501st, 502nd, 503rd and the 506th will be dispatched. More details will follow, so don't be late then. Sixteen hundred hours at the briefing room next Monday.

All: Yes sir.

Blain: Questions?

Rico: Are the 501st, 502nd, 503rd and the 506th the only ones that will be going...?

Blain: No, we are the ones that will leave on that particular day. The 505th and the 507th are leaving tonight.

Ezran: How many forces are dispatched in total, sir?

Blain: 36.000 troops...

Jarod: Is it that bad sir...?

Blain: I'm afraid it is. We're only being send there as a peace corps. But that doesn't mean it goes without danger. Any other questions?

All: No sir.

Blain: Very well. Carry on.

They saluted and I saluted back... Then I walked out of the barracks... And that night, we watched the first titan taking off with 14.645 of our guys...

3 - Fare thee well...

I still remember the day that Blain came home late in the evening... Normally, he is dressed in his regular outfit rather than his uniform. But that evening, he came home in his uniform... Grey, white and black uniform with pockets and logo's... I remember how it felt when I hugged him that evening. He took my hand and we sat down on the couch...

Nicole: What's wrong hun...?

Blain: We're being shipped out...

Nicole: What, like an exercise? You've been shipped out to dozens of exotic locations. I'm a little envious of you.

Then he shook his head...

Nicole: No...?

Blain: No...

Nicole: Then what is it?

Blain: It's not an exercise this time...

Nicole: You mean...

Then he nodded...

Blain: We're being shipped out to the north...

Nicole: No...

Blain: Yeah...

Nicole: But...

Blain: We're not the only ones going...

Nicole: No but...

Blain: Hm...?

Nicole: I don't want you to go... I mean... It's dangerous! People get killed out there!

Blain: That's why we're being sent there to do something about it...

Nicole: Isn't there a way so that you don't have to go?!

Blain: ... No, I'm afraid not... We're already a part of it...

Nicole: But what do you think of it yourself?! Don't you get anything to say about it?!

Blain: Look... Nicole... These humans, they have no money, no food, no education, no future or just about anything... And there are two things I can do... Help them by doing something, or sit back and watch them

destroy themselves on television...

He's got a point... And I didn't like it... Everything just looked so grim all of a sudden... I mean... There always was a possibility that he could be send out on missions there, but I just didn't think about it. And now that he is going I'm afraid all of a sudden... I'm worried... I wish I could do anything to stop it, but there was nothing I could do...

He came home on a Friday and for the last two days, he was quiet... He didn't talk much... Everyone could see he had a hard time going there and I didn't think it was because he was afraid that he might get hurt there. I think he was worried because of all the things happening there. Memories of the first war that got suppressed as the years went by. And now all of a sudden, it feels like everything came back. Technically, it's not even a war their waging in the north, but I guess he felt like it was already a full-blown war. And whatever he did, there was nothing he could do to change it... And I guess that was the most difficult thing for him...

Sunday evening at around 19:00 pm everyone got out to say goodbye to him. When they heard he had to go to the north, it was something they didn't expect, and yet everyone knew it was possible for him to go... Amy was fixing his collar of his uniform as we all stood there to say goodbye to him...

Amy: There...

Blain: Thanks Amy... *hugs Amy*

Amy: Don't mention it... Be careful out there ok...? *hugs Blain*

Blain: Yeah, I will...

He gave a weak smile as the others came forward to say goodbye...

Cody: Sergeant, might I say you're looking absolutely fabulous in you're uniform?

Blain: Hehehe, stupid...

Cody: Hey, don't worry about it. Things are gonna be ok...

Blain: I know...

Cody: C'mere man... *hugs Blain*

Blain: *hugs Cody*

Cody: Be careful out there.

Blain: Will do.

Rouge: Wait, wait, you got a smudge on your cheek.

Blain: Where?

Rouge: Hold still. *wipes smudge away*

Blain: How old do you think I am? *smiles*

Rouge: I'm still older.
Blain: That's true.
Rouge: Yup... *hugs Blain*
Blain: *hugs Rouge*
Rouge: Take care, pincushion...
Blain: *nods and smiles*

Sonic: Well, I wish I could go but...
Blain: But what?
Sonic: Bad knee ya know?
Blain: Hehehe.
Sonic: Just get back home safe alright?
Blain: Yeah, will do. *hugs Sonic*
Sonic: *hugs Blain*

Knuckles: See if you can find a souvenir or something while you're there...
Blain: What'd you like?
Knuckles: I don't know, a coffee mug or something. Anything.
Blain: I'll see what I can dig up. I better get hazard pay... *smiles nervously*
Knuckles: Hehehe... *hugs Blain*
Blain: *hugs Knuckles*
Knuckles: Get back home in one piece or I'll make sure you will.
Blain: Hehe...

Julie-Su: You look handsome in a uniform, ya know that?
Blain: Oh come on...
Julie-Su: No really, chicks dig that. Just look at Nicole, she's drooling all over you.

Nicole: *smiles*
Blain: What about him over there?
Julie-Su: Yeah I got my Knuxie-poo. You gotta see if you can arrange a uniform for him.

Lara-Su: Mooooooooooooom...
Blain: Knuxie-poo...
Knuckles: Hey shut up.
Julie-Su: Be safe Blain.
Blain: *nods*
Julie-Su: Heh...
Blain: Lara...
Lara-Su: You really wanna go...?
Blain: Nope... But I'll have to...
Lara-Su: How long will you be gone?
Blain: No idea. But you'll see me popping up when I'm home.
Lara-Su: I'm gonna miss you... *hugs Blain*
Blain: I know... I'm gonna miss you too... *hugs Lara-Su*

Then Blain looked at me... We cuddled for a long time and kissed as he stared in my eyes. He didn't

say anything to me. Not an "I love you" or "I'm gonna miss you"... Nothing. Maybe he couldn't do it. Maybe it was hard for him to say that. Like it was saying farewell to each other... He compensated words with kisses and cuddles... It only lasted for 10 minutes or something but it seemed like forever. And with that, he turned around to look at everyone, and walked away with a huge backpack without looking back...

I had no idea what was waiting over there for me. Although the whole situation up north seems to calm down, and although we were fully protected by bases, sentries and battle armour, I still had a funny feeling when I left. Maybe it's because a part of me stayed in that village. Just the idea of risking my life once again for something that isn't even my fight was enough for me not to go. It's because I got things to live for unlike the old days. I got Nicole, Sonic and all the other guys... Lara-Su who was practically my own daughter... They weren't just friends anymore, but they became family. And it feels like I'm abandoning them while I should be there and watch over them. Shadow told me once that he feels like we're soulmates. That he could relate to me and every situation I've been in. Struggling with yourself when the world is against you. I had that a long time ago, and I got everything that made it worth to fight for. I'm glad I fought back then for the things I cherish now, but it didn't made any sense back then. So why did I fought back then? Just for the frack of it? Maybe, I don't know...

As soon as I reached the base, Tavish was already packing his gear. He was the first one to arrive on that Sunday night. He asked me questions about what was going to happen, but there was no answer I could give him. Truth be told, I had no idea myself. And not long after that, the others of my regiment dripped in one by one until the group was complete. We talked for hours about what was bothering them and asking questions which I couldn't answer...

The next day, everyone was still nervous. We only had sleep for a few hours and I tried to let them relax as much as possible by doing the things they did the most. Some went down the firing range, others went to the obstacle course while some others just stayed in the barracks and read a book or something. But the tension could be seen in their eyes as they didn't know what was gonna happen once we get onboard of the Titan.

Monday afternoon, sixteen hundred hours. The whole regiment got together in the briefing room as we waited nervously for our assignment. Then some big chief walks in. I've never seen him before...

Blain: Attention on deck!!

Major: At east.

Then we all sat down again as that major guy fired up holographic images and animations on the table of all sorts of things.

Major: As you have heard last Friday, one of our outposts was under attack. Recon shows out there no survivors of the attack and currently, the first two titans took off with reinforcements. We will be sending an additional 568,231 troops, scattered in a V formation. Most of these troops are communication engineers to get everything working there again. You will be stationed away from the frontline, but on high alert. This is all just a precaution just encase as they try to work out diplomatic solutions and bring those who were responsible for the attack to justice. This mission will take at most three weeks, so if everything works out, you'll be home in no time. Keep in mind to have you're eyes peeled. If you see something, don't shoot until fired upon, and also inform you're commanding officer. Remember, this is a peace mission, not some brawl alley shoot out. Tonight at zero hundred hours you'll be leaving by Titan dropship, along with tanks and battlewalkers. The Titan itself will be escorted by 5 UH-51 Nyra Gunships.

Everyone was a bit baffled including me. I thought it was much worse than that... And we're only being stationed there until we got something to do... It's kinda like a holiday actually...

Major: Questions?

Onyx: Is that everything sir?

Major: Yes, pretty much. Anyone else?

Then we all looked around to see if anyone else had questions. Nope...

Major: Very well. Have a safe journey. Dismissed.

Then we walked out of the briefing room with our morals raised. Everyone started joking and laughing again and for the rest of the day, we continued doing things we liked.

As night came, we all packed our gear and went to the Titan area. It was still a few kilometres away but we didn't mind... Once we got there, we saw only one Titan, and that thing was so big it was about a hundred and twenty four storeys high and at least a kilometre in length. The huge loading platforms were supported by two massive hydraulic pumps as you could hear heavy boots stamping on the steel plated floors. Tanks, battlewalkers, 4x4 recon vehicles, supplies and lots more were loaded onboard. Everything on the Titan just radiates raw power and the guys and I were impressed by the sheer magnitude of this thing as we continued walking towards it...

As soon as we checked in, we looked for a spot to gather. They all sit down on the ground and placed their gear next to them, as they continued joking and laughing. It was actually hard to hear them, because of the noise everyone else made and the sounds of the tanks and battlewalkers...

Blain: Guys listen up. I want you to realize one thing. Although we are away from the frontline and are stationed just encase, I want you to realize this is dead serious. People get killed out there, and I do not want to lose any of you.

Argento: You're too fond of us sarge?!

Blain: Yes, especially you Argento. Don't tell me the time in the shower didn't mean anything to you.

Then everyone just laughed and sucker punched Argento. It's all fun and games to them, but I want them to realize it's dangerous...

Blain: Things might turn out different once we get there. And if it does, put you're training to use. You know how to survive and what to do. Everything is explained in the book. But it's way different once you killed for the very first time. You'll change. I changed...

Then they all just looked at me...

Ryder: What was it like sir...?

Blain: It's something I don't wanna wish my worst enemy... You're forced to take lives after lives as you go on. But it's all natural. You don't think about it. Not only after it's truly over and those images will haunt you. Losing friends you've been with for a very long time... It's something you can't describe, except I can tell that I know what I'm talking about. I did things back then I'm not proud of, and I regret most of it. I didn't think of it then, but I guess that's the reason why I deflected. At first I thought I deflected to keep myself alive once we realized we were losing the war. But it was much deeper then that. And that's something I don't regret. It gave me freedom and something worth to fight for, although I paid a very high price for it. But I got there. And I earned it more then anyone could...

You could see they were thinking. They were even more puzzled now as to the question where I came from. But I think the message was clear to them though. Once I noticed they were looking at my scars and my left arm, I knew the message was clear to them.

Blain: Do what you're told... Put use in what you've learned and ya'll go home in one piece.

Rico: Will do sir.

Blain: Here, catch.

I got out a pack of bubblegum and threw everyone a piece. Then it was time to board the Titan. Instead of getting up themselves, I helped them getting up by lending a hand. My left hand to be exact. They felt the metallic structure of it, and once they got on their feet, I looked them in their eyes. Words didn't mean anything at that moment. They could all see what I meant and they nodded as they got onboard one by one on the Titan. Two hours later, we set off...

While I was onboard, I decided to call Nicole. I missed her, and I think she was worried...

Phone: ... Hello...?

Blain: Hey it's me...

Phone: Blain?! How are you doing?! Are you already there?!

Blain: No... I'm onboard of the Titan and we just left. I didn't wake you did I?

Phone: No! Of course not! Are you worried...?

Blain: No. We're being stationed away from the front line and only come in action when we need to.

Phone: Any information of how long you'll be staying there...?

Blain: Yeah, three weeks at most. So I'll be home before you know it. We're only meant as back-up.

Phone: That's good to hear...

Blain: Yeah... How's Lara doing?

Phone: Hehe, she already misses you. She wants to know if you're gonna make pancakes once you get home.

Blain: I might... Hehehe... So she's with you?

Phone: Yeah, along with everyone else.

Blain: Tell them I said hi ok?

Phone: Will do.

Blain: Listen, I got to go now. There are others waiting.

Phone: Alright then...

Blain: I try to call as soon as I got another opportunity ok?

Phone: Ok... Be careful.

Blain: Will do...

Phone: I love you...

Blain: I love you too... Bye...

Phone: Bye...

For some reason, I had a lot of trouble disconnecting the call. There was this feeling I had, like I was saying goodbye already. And apparently, Nicole had the same... She couldn't hang up either. I stood there with the telephone receiver in my hand for a while, staring in blank space until one

of the guys asked me if I was done already...

It was good to hear from Blain... Except I couldn't shake of this feeling that something was about to happen. He sounded relaxed and mellow, but as soon as we said goodbye it was like we were saying farewell...

And that same night, I had that same bad dream again...

4 - The way things are

It was around 1:45 AM that I called Nicole. I wasn't very sleepy so I was walking around on the deck of the Titan. And every once in a while, saw you this blue glow going over the Titan, which was the shield. And although the Titan was flying at an average speed of about 120 kilometres an hour, you didn't feel any wind which was held back by the shield. As I stood at the edge, leaning over the railing while smoking a cigarette, I stuck my hand outside the shield. And then I could feel strong winds hitting my hand. I looked at the beautiful scenario that was passing by slowly in the distance, where you could see trees and small villages and even lakes and rivers as you hear the jet engines of the titan below... It was actually very relaxing...

Rico: Evening Sarge...

I looked up and saw Rico standing next to me.

Blain: Evening Rico...

Rico: I got a coffee for you if you want.

Blain: Thanks...

Then he leaned on the rail as well and stared at the scenery that was passing by slowly... I looked at him and offered him a smoke.

Rico: Its really gonna happen now isn't it Sarge?

Blain: Yeah... Are you nervous?

Rico: Hell, I've never seen combat in my life before. Would it be a stupid thing to say that I am nervous?

Blain: Naah... Of course not.

Rico: Were you never afraid sir?

Blain: All the time Rico... The trick is not to show that you're afraid.

Rico: Why not?

Blain: Fear is like a virus... It spreads out and it infects other people...

Rico: I see...

Jarod/Mace/Shifty/Tavish: Sarge...

Blain: Guys...

Jarod: Sucking up like always Rico?

Rico: Man, frack you...

Jarod: Hehehe...

Shifty: You're gonna drink that sir?

Blain: I might, why?

Shifty: Because I've never see you drink coffee ever since I got on the regiment and I could use an ol' cup 'a Joe sir.

Blain: Here, take it before I spill it accidentally on you.

Shifty: Thaaaaaaaanks... Aw yeah... Hey Rico, how about some cream and sugar?

Jarod: Yeah and while you're at it, bring a cheese burger for me.

Then Rico sighed reluctant and went inside to get cream and sugar...

Tavish: Why you're always picking on Rico like that?

Shifty: Cuz, he's the new guy. New guys always get picked on.

Blain: Like you?

Shifty: Come on sarge, don't start on that...

Tavish: Tell it to Mace and Jarod, sir!

Mace: Do tell sarge, do tell.

Jarod: Yeah, I never it heard it as well.

Blain: Well this one time, I was barking orders around. Tavish and some other guys pulled off a stunt which I wasn't too happy about.

Tavish: I learned my lesson sir.

Blain: Damn right you should, you cheeky bugger. Anyway, then all of a sudden, this guy stood next to me, yelling in my ear "PRIVATE SHIFTY REPORTING FOR DUTY SIR!!!"

Jarod/Mace/Tavish: *laughs*

Shifty: ...

Blain: Seriously, I was pissed off because of the stunt Tavish pulled out with the others so I wasn't really in the mood. Shifty gave me a letter saying he got reassigned to my regiment.

Jarod: Then what happened sir?

Blain: I replied to Shifty, "How did an asswipe like you pass selection?" And he responded in a high pitched voice "WITH LOTS OF DEVOTION SIR!!!"

All: *laughs*

Shifty: Hey, I was nervous. I was shooting my pants when I found out this guy was gonna be my commanding officer. You had one hell of a reputation sir.

Blain: Yeah, except I also did something back whenever you guys do something right. But if you frack it up, I'll make everyone pay for it.

Jarod: Yeah... I remember I had to brush the floors with my toothbrush when I first got to the regiment.

Blain: You got a new one right?

Jarod: Yup. Hehehe...

Blain: If only you used it once in a while. Holy frack, you're breath stinks.

Jarod: ...

All: *laughs*

Mace: Meh, I'm glad I'm not with that Lennox guy though. They say he's much worse.

Blain: Lennox is a college boy barking out orders. The only reason why he's a sergeant is because his uncle is some high ranked chief behind a desk. I can't stand it. He's never done anything good worth to mention.

Jarod: Don't say that out loud Sarge. They might get back on you for that. What if someone blabbers it around...? Hmmm...?

Blain: Then I'll make you do push-ups.

Jarod: ... Fair enough. It's safe with me sir.

It stayed silent for a while as we all looked at the scenery...

Shifty: *sighs* I can't wait to get home.

Blain: You've just been away for a few hours.

Shifty: Yeah I know but... There was always this special scent at home whenever my mom was cooking. And I just miss that already.

Jarod: Well I can't wait to get home to my girlfriend...

Shifty: I thought the sarge was you're girlfriend, Jarod.

Blain: Hehehe...

Jarod: You got a girl at home Tavish?

Tavish: Eeh... No, I don't have a girlfriend. I don't want one either. You're spending six hours in a shopping mall only to be returned to the first shop where she visited first. She gets first dibs on everything and all... Like food for example. I dont like that.

Shifty: That's called manners, dumbass! Your supposed to give your girlfriend first dibs on everything.

Tavish: Well. I don't have manners. Some people say manners are needed to eat properly, or in socializing, but I'll tell you one thing. I never learned anything about manners and I've been eating and talking my whole life.

All: *Laughs*

Jarod: Naah. You gotta choose you're words carefully if you wanna impress a girl.

Shifty: Yeah, like saying the right things. Like... Sensitive stuff ya know? They got a sensitive spot when it comes to that.

Tavish: Yeah that's called her thingly.

All: *laughs*

Jarod: ... I remember when I was on exercise in Mesa Grandá. frackin' hell...

Blain: What happened?

Jarod: Well it was some exotic place filled with hot girls ya know. I was talking to one of them, and she was pretty hot. Then all of a sudden, she cracked a smile, and then I was like, holy frack!!

Mace: What, yellow rotten teeth?!

Jarod: frack no, I wished. Her teeth were split like a tsunami was wreaking havoc there man, I swear!! Could fit a motherfracking whale in there!!

All: *laughs*

Jarod: Then I stared at her tits, and I swear, the moment I looked, I heard a "TOING!!! TOING!!!" and I was staring at her nipples that looked like frackin' toothpicks man!! Geez!! What the hell!!!

All: *laughs*

Shifty: Then what?!

Jarod: Haha, she told me she was home alone!! So I knew what was coming! But she so was damn hot!! Except those teeth and those nipples man!! They kept haunting me!!

All: *laughs*

Jarod: And then she was like-

Then all of a sudden, we heard a loud explosion. As soon as we looked over the railing to the front, we saw one of the gunships on fire and going down.

Jarod: What the frack was that?!

More and more people ran up and down the Titan to see the gunship going down in flames. I think the pilots were killed instantly because no one was ejecting... Then a lot more explosions were heard...

Shifty: Are we under attack?!!

Tavish: Get down!!!!

Just in a nick of time, we got down as debris from a gunship flew over us. Some guys we didn't know got hit by it and got knocked off the Titan. As we looked over the railing, we saw a few guys falling down a long way with no signs of life... Then Rico ran towards us...

Mace: frackin' hell!!

Rico: All of the gunships got shot down!!

Blain: What?!!

Jarod: All of them?!!

Tavish: Where did it come from?!!

Looking down over the railing to see if there was something down there didn't help either... It was too dark to see anything. Then all of a sudden, I saw a smoke trail in the distance and not long after that, another explosion was heard. You could see the blue glow of the shield spreading out over the Titan like a shockwave...

Shifty: Oh frack, oh frack, oh frack, oh frack, this isn't good!!

Rico: Ya think?!! Their trying to bring down the motherfrackin' shield here!!

Tavish: What should we do sir?!!

All I could do was to stare at the scenery... I heard the pulse cannons charging up underneath the Titan, and not long after that, an ear deafening noise was heard as some blue plasma like ball got shot out of the cannons. It hit the forest below and everything that was underneath it was annihilated. Trees shattered like toothpicks and we could hear people scream down there...

Tavish: Sir?!!

Blain: Get to the far end of the Titan-!!

And more explosions were heard... Then all of a sudden, the blue glow of the Titan flickered and died out...

Jarod: Oh no...

Tavish: What?!!

Jarod: Titan shield is down!! Get moving!! Go!!

We all ran to the far end of the Titan as more explosions were heard. You saw smoke trails in the distance and massive explosion after explosion occurred. There was this huge blazing fire as black thick smoke was floating upwards in the middle of the ship. And as I took a look to see what the damage was, it was enormous. Huge gaping holes and chunks out of the Titan could be seen, and you saw people falling down. It was then we realized the Titan was lost. And the missiles kept on coming... At some point, the front of the Titan started to tear apart and broke lose. And the only thing we could do was to firmly hang on to something. Escape pods were launched, and we also heard gunfire on the ground. Then the back of Titan started to go down... The front of it made a one eighty turn and crashed at the back, and then it got separated from the

rest as it plummeted to the ground... The back of the Titan started to capsize and we could barely hold on. Then the last thing I could remember was that as soon the Titan hit the ground at around 120 kilometres an hour, we fell off...

I didn't know how long I've been unconscious... I heard all people screaming in my mind and it just didn't stop. As I slowly opened my eyes, it was all blurry and I felt really dizzy... My legs hurt a lot and I noticed a deep cut in my left leg. The shoopty thing was that I had no idea where I was, and I had no weapons whatsoever. I didn't know where everybody was, and yet I heard everyone scream as gunfire was heard in the distance. I got up with a lot of pain and effort and tried to find the others. Walking around hurt a lot but I had to...

Blain: Jarod!! Shifty!! Tavish!! Ma-

Then I stepped on something. As I looked down, I couldn't see what it was I stepped on, but as I took a closer look, I notice it was a hand. I removed the debris that was lying near it, and I saw it was Mace. I felt his wrist and checked if he was still breathing, but he wasn't. I closed his eyelids and yanked his dogtags from his neck... I grabbed his backpack, opened it and ripped the isolation material to use as a bandage. I tied it to stop the bleeding on my leg, but it didn't really help at all. Then all of a sudden, I could hear something terrifying... The sounds of artillery shells coming down... It makes that particular whistle noise and the scary thing is that you don't know where it will land... I knew I had to get away fast, which I did...

The first artillery barrage was expected... I could hear it from a distance and everyone yelled to take cover... I heard familiar voices but I couldn't see them. As soon as the first explosion was heard, I jumped in the nearest crater I saw, making myself as small as possible... Then I just looked around and saw trees exploding... It was like every sound in the world died off and that I could only see... Then I realized I had a smile on my face... It reminded me of how we used to celebrate New Years Eve back home, and that one time, Cody blacked out the entire village by an EMP grenade... Even my arm wasn't functional anymore when he pulled that stunt... I snapped out of my daydream by loud voices, and noticed the artillery barrage stopped... Everyone yelled to find each other and calling for medics... And as I looked up, I noticed Jarod not too far from me.

???: I cant get up!! ... I cant get up!!!

Jarod: Is that Ezran?!

Blain: Stay down!! Stay in the craters!!

I climbed out of the crater and ran towards the place where I heard the voice, and noticed I got followed by Vaux. And as soon as we arrived, we noticed that Ezran's legs got blown off... Vaux grabbed him under his armpits and lifts him up...

Vaux: I got ya Ezran!! you're gonna be ok!!
Ezran: My-My weapon!! I forgot my weapon!!
Vaux: It's ok!! Leave it!! Don't worry about it!!

Suddenly, without warning, the second artillery barrage was raining down on us... We all ran and shouted to take cover in those craters again... Vaux ran away with Ezran, and he was yelling his lungs out... They went east to a near by crater, but got hit by a shell... They both died instantly...

As I was running, I was overwhelmed by the ear deafening noise and exploding trees... I saw guys flying through the air, shortly after being followed by a limb... At that same time, I saw Forza and Hershey in a crater, yelling to me to hurry up... A few hundred meters behind me, was another explosion. It knocked me down, and as I looked up, I saw Forza and Hershey being annihilated by an artillery shell... They just went up in smoke... Just like that... I quickly recovered, and saw Tavish hiding in a crater. I dove down, and I got pulled down by him.

During that second barrage, I wasn't laughing anymore. A dead guy landed not to far from us, while half of his body got blown off. The artillery fire only lasted for about 10 minutes... But it seem like it was taking forever. It died down... We saw an artillery shell hitting our crater, but didn't explode... It was smoking and sizzling, as Tavish and I were shaking severely... The two of us stared at it as I got my pack of smokes out from under my jacket and gave Tavish one as well... We lighted up the cigs with shaky hands as the gunfire died down... We stayed there for the rest of the night, and as dawn broke, we looked for survivors...

As the sun came up, it showed the devastation that was caused during that fight. Everywhere you looked, you saw wrecks of our tanks, battlewalkers and there was fire everywhere. Every now and then, you still hear explosions caused by ammunition and fuel. The body count was enormous... The only way I can describe it is that it was just one massive slaughter... And everywhere you looked, you saw dead, maimed furries. Some were incinerated by the blazing fires as they couldn't escape and just burned to death. I remember the smell of gunpowder and death that was in the air... Seeing all those dead bodies and wrecks made me realize how lucky I was that I escaped with my life...

Out of the 568,231 people on board the "Soraya" Titan, only 36 people survived the attack... Walking out of the forests with only Tavish, Jarod, Shifty, Rico and me as the only survivors of the 506th

regiment was a colossal loss... But... I guess it's just war... It's all part of it... No one is to blame... It's just the way things are...

5 - Break the silence...

The Tuesday that was following started out normal. Blain called the last day, and told me everything. I haven't heard from him since, but I assumed he was just fine. As the day passed by, I still didn't hear anything. But that evening, as I was watching the news on TV with Lara-Su, I found out what happened...

Tv: The situation remains uncertain as GUN and ICA troops continue to advance to the south. What seems to be the start of a coup on the government, no one really has answers.

Then the TV switched to some news reporter. What troubled me was that there were MNAF troops carrying injured soldiers in the background as thick black smoke and blazing fires could be seen as well...

Tv: Earlier this morning, reconnaissance troops were under fire as they were trying to investigate a Titan that got shot down last night. Only recently, it was confirmed that GUN troops were behind the attack, and that it serves as "retribution". GUN placed an ultimatum on the MNAF troops to retreat out of their territories or the consequences will be severe according to them.

Tv: Any word if there were any survivors on the Titan?

Tv: Sadly, no. As far as known, there are no survivors.

Nicole: Oh no... Tell me this isn't happening...

The image of the burning wreck of the Titan in the background was burned on my eyes... I kept seeing it, no matter how many times I tried to look away... I just couldn't believe it... I noticed I was shaking and it felt like I had something stuck in my throat... I felt how my lips were starting to vibrate and how severely my hands were shaking... But... I had to look... I had to know...

Tv: Right, so the current situation is that MNAF troops are to fall back to the south?

Tv: That's right. GUN troops are taking back territories that belonged to them. But after the war was over, they got driven away from their lands. Now they are just simply claiming their property.

Tv: Yes, well as you can see, the chaos over here is enormous. Hundreds of soldiers trying to evacuate the wounded, the casualties and of course, civilians, as they keep an eye on the surroundings. It's a lot of chaos over here and what probably is the most disturbing, is that it's all happening not too far away. Just a few hundred kilometres from where the Titan departed as no one is informed from where it took off, seeing as it is confidential. The most-

Tv: You guys have to go, it's way too hot here.

Then all of a sudden, shots were heard as you could see soldiers forming a line and taking cover...

Tv: Gunshots are being fired at this point and-

Tv: Would you guys get the hell out of here?!! .

Tv: Go! Go! Get moving!

As soon as others heard the news, we didn't know what to do... I mean... Everything looked so surreal... Everything we ever build up over the last 23 years just shattered to pieces by a fraction of a moment... Ya know...? It's... I can't describe it... Retribution...? For what...? To gain back some land...? They think it's necessary to kill Blain for a piece of mud and grass...? Don't they realize what they've done to me...? I just didn't understand... I...

It wasn't until nightfall that I cried over Blain... All day I kept walking around with images in my head, and that really scared me... But the fact that he wasn't next to me in bed that night and that I couldn't feel his strong arm around my stomach hurt me the most... I know he means a lot to me, but that night, I realized he means a lot more than that... Everything seemed so natural and everything was so taken for granted over the years that it was natural for him to be with me... And now he just isn't... And I miss him already... My pillows got soaked with bitter tears... But... I also questioned myself... What will become of me without him...?

The sorrow I felt didn't fade away as a few days passed by... In fact, it only got worse... Every day I was reminded that he wasn't here anymore... And each day, it got worse... They announced that GUN forces were closing in on the south, and our full military arsenal and troops were dispatched to stop them from advancing in on the south. But it was inevitable. It was only a matter of time. Sometimes our forces managed to drive them back but got overrun quickly. No one could sleep at those nights, knowing that they were closing in. At some point, tv's and radio's broadcasted that all the major cities are to be evacuated... Until one day, GUN troops arrived in Deberan while our forces couldn't be seen anywhere...

I still remember that day... I was doing groceries with Cody when they came rolling in with their tanks and all sorts of stuff... No one could stand it that they were in our city but we couldn't do anything. After all, they are the ones with the guns. And what would happen if people without weapons take on people that do have weapons? What usually happens when people without guns stand up to people with guns... And that's exactly what happened...

The soldiers didn't meddle with the civilians, but every riot and everyone provoking it got arrested. The soldiers weren't hostile to us, and all I could think of is that we should stay out of the way... Until it was inevitable that we got caught up with them... And that happened when I was in town with Cody and were on our way home...

Cody: Hey, what's happening over there?

Nicole: Where?

Cody: On the square!

And as we walked by the towns square, we noticed a large group of soldiers and a bunch of people were yelling at the soldiers. Then at some point, the soldiers took action and punched people with the butts of their rifles. Cody bumped into me and nodded in a direction where some vehicles were standing. A few people of the group got placed inside those vehicles as a group of soldiers raided a house... I just stood there watching with Cody and a bunch of other people...

Cody: What the hell is going on...?

Nicole: Their rounding up random people...?

Echidna: Yeah.

Nicole: Why...?

Echidna: Apparently, some corpse of a human was found in the forest. Turned out to be some high ranked officer that got killed by someone and they wanna know who it was.

Cody: What's gonna happen to them?

Echidna: I have no idea...

Hedgehog: They are gonna keep them as prisoners. If the perpetrator of the murder doesn't turn himself in, all of those people will be up against the wall.

Nicole: ... You mean they will be shot...?

Hedgehog: Yeah. I heard it happened in other cities as well... It's called retribution. They think it'll scare us. Pssh. Bunch of pussies. *spits on the ground*

Then all of a sudden, I heard people yell. As I looked up, I saw one of the people who got rounded up running away. And then they started shooting... Cody pulled me down behind the fountain and yelled at me if I was out of my mind. Maybe I was. I know he tried to pretend like nothing happened but, shots were fired... Like it wasn't a big deal. Yet it all happened right in front of our noses... We stayed down until the yelling stopped and heard those vehicles driving off... And then we got up and saw the devastation it left... I saw a few people down on the ground... Innocent bystanders that got hit by the gunfire... I guess they weren't fast enough... A few people that were on the ground were still alive, but two were badly hit... And as I looked to my left, there was a woman not too far from me holding a small child and there was a huge blood splatter on the wall near that kid... She was hit in the chest, but that kid was shot in the head, like the bullet went through the chest of the woman... She was holding her kid

close to her... All I could do was to look at her and she cried her eyes out and there was nothing I could do... She was dying except she didn't realize it yet... And not long after that, the crying stopped... People were buzzing all around me as paramedics arrived at the scene as the yelling started again.... But I didn't care about that. I still stared at the woman with the kid... Then I just ran off... I felt like I could burst out in tears any second and just wanted to get away... And on my way home, I cried... And that day, 5 precious lives were lost forever...

As soon as I got home, I dove down on the couch and just cried... It wasn't a pretty sight to witness everything... Fear made room for anger and hate towards the GUN... I guess I wasn't the only one thinking like that...

It started out as rioting in Deberan because of what happened. But right from the beginning you knew this was different. As the days slowly passed by, it was happening in small villages, towns, and it soon came to the big cities... The riots brutally ended in bloodshed and gunfire and as a few days went by, more and more bloodshed was happening on the streets... Tv's and radio's broadcasted the riots and at some point, it totally escalated and it even started to look like a guerrilla war... MNAF troops were also sent to the large cities and small towns and Deberan was one of them. GUN troops got driven out of the city because they couldn't take on the heavily armed MNAF troops.. Army blockades of the MNAF troops made sure no one could enter or exit the city without permission...

Then one night, while I was in bed, I heard an ear deafening noise... And another one... And another one... It kept on going through out the night and I saw large flashes of light every time I was looking out the window, shortly being followed by a loud bang. I could see fire and smoke in the distance... And of course I was scared... Everyone was scared... We had to run, but we didn't know where to... Tv's and radio broadcasted all those attacks that were happening on a large scale throughout the south continent... And this was only happening in just a few days...

Then about a week later, it wasn't on the TV anymore... It was on the street outside. You could see it through your own windows... By the time they tried to evacuate the cities, it was already too late... MNAF Army blockades were overrun by GUN troops... Before the TV and radio stopped broadcasting, there were reports of invasions all over the southern continent... We didn't hear anything more after that... And that's when we knew that we had to flee...

Meanwhile...

???: General, I was expecting you. Please, take a seat. I'll be right with you.

General: Thank you sir. The reports should be in soon.

???: That's not why I summoned for you, general.

General: Excuse me sir?

???: My apologies for luring you under false pretences, but I can not risk a leak.

General: I'm... Not sure I understand...

???: It all begins 26 years ago... General: During the great war?

???: Yes. The late doctor Ivo Robotnik created lifeforms, moulded it into something dangerous... They were known as the RRTS, a deadly Spec Ops team capable of doing the most daring assassination operations ever known...

General: Yes... But they're all dead...

???: Except for one...

General: But you wouldn't know if he's still alive today...

???: He is.

General: ... Presuming this guy still exists... He's still just a furrie... What's the big deal?

???: The big deal...? He's the perfect furrie... A thousand year lifespan, 10 times better vision, hearing, sensing and strength than the average furrie... His DNA is a how-to manual for any cloning lab on the planet... With this creature in their clutches, there's no stopping them to create a whole platoon of these creatures... A whole army...

General: But it's not something to be bothered with. We can overrun them with ease and our arsenal and Titan fleet-

???: The Titan fleet and our full military arsenal wont do us much good if we're all slaves of some clone army dictatorship now will it?!!

General: ...

???: You have no idea what you are talking about general... Inform Zakhaev of the situation and the changes in objectives...

General: Zakhaev reported he already neutralized him a decade ago... Sir...

???: But he was seen a few days ago!!

General: With no success... He lost trail of him again...

???: Then what the hell has he been doing for all these years?!! I didn't pay him to play hide and seek with that son of a dog!! Zakhaev might be some freelance gun for hire, but that doesn't mean he's free to do as he pleases!! I paid him to hunt that furrie down and to neutralize him!! Nothing else!!

General: He's very hard to track down sir... He's like a ghost...

???: Then he better step on it before heads are gonna roll...

General: Yes sir...

That particular night, my door got barged in and the lights got turned on. At first, I was terrified, because I thought GUN troops were raiding our village, but then I saw it was Cody...

Cody: Get up, get you're things.

Nicole: Wha-What's happening?

Cody: Look outside the window...

And as I looked outside the window, I could see people carrying bags and walking towards the city. As I looked up, I saw an enormous Titan armada gently floating by in the sky, right above us... There were like, 20 to 30 Titan ships in the air... Their logo's indicated they are from GUN...

Cody: Come on, come on, come on, get you're things!!

So I packed a few things in a bag... Clothes mainly, and some other crap that wasn't really necessary and I got dressed quickly... Are we truly leaving everything behind...? At some point, Cody grabbed my shoulder and was pushing me towards the door. And as I stood outside, I noticed Sonic, Knuckles, Shadow and a few others banging on doors telling to the people inside to get out... Lara-Su, Amy, Julie-Su and Rouge were already standing outside with a few others, gawping at the skies towards the Titan armada. About half an hour later, the whole village gathered around near the lake discussing and arguing on what to do...

Cody: No! Staying isn't an option!! We gotta get moving before it's too late! Now we still can!

Knuckles: Cody's right... It's way too-

Guy: Dangerous!! How the hell could you even think of something like that?!

Amy: He has a point...

Guy: You're gonna expose you're daughter to danger?! Look!! Their all heading towards the city!! It's suicide going there!!

Amy: Another point made... Maybe it's safer to stay here and mind our own business...

Guy: Who's to say that they are gonna meddle with us...?

Tails: You see that?! You see those fires and black smoke coming out of the city?!

Knuckles: Who's assuring that it's not coming over here?!!

Rouge: Whoa, whoa, wait. Maybe you guys are jumping the gun a bit...

Cody: Maybe so, but I'm not gonna risk my life for something stupid like this!! Already there have been lives lost of people trying to cool the situation down!! Think of Blain for frack's sake!! He died while trying to make a difference and to end it!! Staying here and die means Blain died in vain!! Died for shoot,

for nothing!!!

Then we all stared at Cody as he looked at everyone... I've never seen him so pissed in my entire life...

Cody: Staying here means you will DIE!! Don't you get it?!! It's not just a conflict anymore!! Look up!! See those Titans?!! See the fires blazing in the city?!! It's war!! ... fracking hell, what's wrong with you people...?!! ...I don't know what you guys are gonna do, but I'm going!! I'm going alone if I have to!! Because I'm not intending to give my life to the humans who are making one big cemetery out of this fracking continent!!

Then it stayed silent for a while...

Cody: You think I'm not scared...? Of course I am... But we gotta do something or else we will all die... And... The best thing I can think of is to get moving...

Nicole: Right behind ya Cody...

Cody: Thanks Nic... I don't know what you guys are doing, but I'm going. Maybe one day we will see each other again. ... Good bye... And... Good luck...

Then he grabbed his bag with a few belongings and started to walk towards the city... I looked at everyone else, and grabbed my bag as well and went after him... Not long after that, Sonic, Knuckles, Tails, Amy, Julie-Su, Shadow and Rouge followed us, while the rest stayed in the village... And while we were walking, I looked back at our village, knowing it would be the last time I was leaving it...

"During the period that GUN forces took over and occupied the west, I did not speak up. I did not speak up because I didn't live there... Then they took over the east... Again, I did not speak up because I didn't live there... Then they came to the south... And by the time they reached the south and thus me, there was no one left to speak up..."

"Nicole..."

6 - Waiting for an explanation that will never come...

Everyone who experienced the artillery barrage was changed. Even I was changed. Even the people who weren't wounded were still victims. Victims of witnessing you're friends being blow up... Victims of witnessing you're friends dieing in you're arms... It left a scar on anyone who was there during the artillery barrage...

We've been walking for 2 weeks now... We were tired... Cold... Hungry... Thirsty... There wasn't much food or water left, but we took some supplies we got from a wrecked base we encountered a week earlier. We encountered a lot of enemy activity but always managed to stay at a distance and hide until it was safe. We didn't had much weapons, and even less ammo. Weapons were used as a last resort and we send out scouts to scan the surroundings for threats before we all went into that direction. So far, there was no gunfight with enemy soldiers. Our plan was to meet up with the 503rd regiment stationed 130 kilometres away. But... Advancing went slow... Our moral was very low, and everyone only talked when something was asked. Fear, desolation, anger and hate could be seen in every person's eye, and truth be told, I was scared shootless... On our way, we picked up a few survivors and they were up-to-date on the current situation. As soon I heard the name "Deberan", I couldn't help but to worry... Every day, I was worrying about Nicole, and if she and the others were alright... I was scared shootless right from the very beginning and stories about Deberan being bombarded by artillery to drive out the MNAF troops was one of those things that really scared me. I've seen war before, and even I was scared shootless but imagine what it must have been like for those who never actually witnessed it...?

Then one night it was raining while we were walking through the muddy, tall grass plains. Just up ahead is a dirt road that is used by people who usually take a walk through the forests or something. You could still see a traffic sign indicating a walking human. Then gradually, stomping sounds in the distance could be heard, along with the roaring engines of the powerful tanks and human boots stamping on mud... That was a scary moment... As soon as the first battlewalker got out of the forest in the distance, we got as low as possible, as more were arriving... Five of them, walking in a V formation while there were 5 tanks and infantry of around 30 men behind the tanks... There was no way we could run, because if we ran now, we would've been seen for sure. So all we could do was to lay still as possible and pray we wouldn't be seen...

But, as soon as they were passing in front of us, we heard a loud explosion. Not long after that, more explosions were heard and one of the battlewalkers got tilted and landed not too far from me...

Blain: Cease fire...!! Cease fire for fracks sake...!! Tavish: No one shot on our side, sir...!!

Then another explosion was heard and another Battlewalker fell down. A few guys jumped up to avoid the battlewalker falling on them, but, of course, they got noticed and a few soldiers turned towards them and started firing as our guys sought cover behind the fallen battlewalker...

Blain: Oh shoot... Suppressing fire!!!

Tavish: Suppressing fire!!!!

Then one by one, the tanks exploded as the two remaining battlewalkers turned to the other side. Then they started firing, but exploded not long after that... A few soldiers were still alive but got shot down quickly. As soon as it looked safe, we ran towards the wrecks to take cover to see what caused the explosion. The few weapons we had were aimed at the grass...

???: Don't shoot!! Friendlies coming out!!

Then a few guys were standing up. Armadillo's, echidna's, hedgehogs and even a lion...

???: Hot damn!! Furrries!! Holy shoot!! Am I glad to see you guys! Sergeant Regan, 503rd regiment.

Then he shook my hand...

Blain: Sergeant Blain, 506th.

Regan: 506th ...? Weren't you guys on that Titan?

Blain: Yeah... Yeah we were. It got shot down 2 weeks ago, and we are the only survivors. We've been walking for weeks now, trying to find you guys...

Regan: I'm sorry to disappoint, but our outpost got annihilated... We are the only survivors as well, just because we were out in the field...

Blain: I see... How did you take these things out...?

Regan: Improvised bombs and anti-tank missiles...

I was staring at those wrecks and the dead human bodies... All this time, I haven't killed anybody, and yet it felt I was responsible for it as well... And at that point, I realized I was changed dramatically. That I'm no longer the person I used to be, but changed into the complete

opposite I once was...

Regan: Yeah, we were expecting them. Except we didn't expect these guys.

Blain: Whadda ya mean?

Regan: We were hoping for a supply convoy to restock supplies, but instead, these guys came. We don't have much either...

Blain: We got even less... I don't even have a weapon...

Regan: ... That's not much indeed.

Blain: Listen... You got a place for us to stay...? A five star hotel with comfortable beds, hot showers and food maybe...?

Regan: We do have a hotel, except it got shot to pieces. All that's intact is the lobby and the first floor. You can spend the night at the second floor, if you like panoramic views. It can get chilly during the night though.

Blain: Hehehe...

Regan: It's in a town near by. We'll see what we can do to help you guys.

Blain: Much appreciated...

Regan: Don't mention it.

Blain: 506th!! Listen up!! Search the convoy and look for any supplies that you can use!! Take as much as you can carry!!

Regan: We're leaving in fifteen minutes. We can't stay here too long or they will notice us. See what you can find.

Blain: Will do. Thanks.

We quickly loaded up supplies from those humans. Mostly ammo and weapons, but we also found some bottles of water and food the soldiers were carrying. I don't know if it was ethical to do, but we did anyway. We took their food and water, seeing as we were starving. Then not long after that, we headed towards a small town not too far away, about half an hour walking. We've been walking for weeks now, so this half an hour shouldn't be too much of a problem either...

On the way there, we didn't encounter any problem. When we arrived in that little town, it got shot to pieces. It was actually a bit scary to see. We tried to get some sleep at night in a huge lobby that used to be a hotel or something... I tried to sleep, but I couldn't... For some reason, I was thinking about the artillery barrage that rained down on us 2 weeks earlier and was thinking how many guys I've lost... I lost a lot of guys in one day... My guys... Guys who I trained for more than two years... And it hurts, you know... As I looked around, I can still see them sitting somewhere and arsing around with the others... Then I made a list of my guys who perished...

Every time I was naming one... It looked like they vanished in thin air... I got out a picture of Nicole, and stared at it... I was talking to her in my thoughts, like the picture could actually hear me and if it would actually talk back. Trying to get a touch... Wondering if she's ok...

Regan: Sergeant!

I didn't hear him at first. I still stared at the picture until I felt someone shaking my shoulders. As I looked up, I noticed it was Regan...

Regan: You ok? You look a little carried away.

Blain: Yeah, I'm fine.

Regan: ... You sure? You're not convincing me.

Blain: *nods*

Regan: Alright then. Let's get you're gear. Follow me.

Then he walked away. So I got up to follow him. He took us to a room where there were a few cases of ammo spread out on a table. A very large .50 cal sniper rifle was also seen, and judging by the design, it wasn't ours. Two shot guns with 15 rounds, and 5 assault rifles with 6 clips and 3 pistols with 2 clips. And that's it...

Blain: ... This is everything you got...?

Regan: Yeah. Sucks, doesn't it?

Blain: ... A lot.

Regan: Alright hotshot, pick something.

Blain: Franchise SPAS-21...

Regan: Special Purpose Automatic Shotgun. Made by Franchise Industries, and manufactured by humans. The SPAS series was long considered to be illegal until this recent model brought change in that. Fires .12 gauge buck shot slugs with a velocity of around 800 metres a second and is operated by gas canisters. Deadly accurate at point blank range and could chop a limb clean off.

Blain: You did your home work.

Regan: Yup... Weapons specialist. In charge of all the tactical weaponry and devices.

Blain: How about that sniper rifle?

Regan: ... Fifty cal. Those bullets are bigger then the average brain of a human. They can penetrate armoured vehicles and shoot through cockpit windows, so once someone got you in sight with that rifle, you're nowhere to be safe.

Blain: Shotgun and pistol.

Regan: You sure?

Blain: Yeah. I got an assault rifle.

Regan: Take care of them. Respect them and they'll respect you.

Blain: ... You sound like I've never seen combat before...

Regan: *sighs* I'm sorry... I don't mean it like that.

Blain: I know. Let's go.

We walked out of the room and went towards the lobby. At some point, Regan gestured to take a look in a room... What we saw were a few civilians on the ground and couches asleep... Well it was late in the night...

Regan: We found a few civilians on the way...

Blain: What are you planning to do with them?

Regan: I don't know... All we can do is just keep watch over them... We can't do much in the mean time...

All we can do is hiding and wait until reinforcements come...

Blain: I see...

I looked at all those civilians and although there were only a few, ranging from a few kids to a few old ones to adults and teens, Nicole kept on wandering through my mind... I just gotta make sure...

Blain: Look eh... You got a phone somewhere...?

Regan: Yeah but the line's dead. A few days ago, they blew up the power plants, leaving us without electricity... We do have a portable satellite phone... Maybe that'll work... Why...?

Blain: Because... I have to call someone... I... I just need to make sure she's alright...

Regan: You're daughter...? Girlfriend...?

Blain: *nods slowly* Girlfriend...

Regan: I see... Give it a try...

He walked away while I stared at those civilians, sleeping like a baby... I didn't understand how they could do that, just to sleep like that, without worrying... Not long after that, I felt a hand on my shoulder and Regan handed me the satellite phone... I dialled Nicole's number... Nothing... Not even a tone... So I tried again... Again, no tone... And again... And again... And again... I spent at least half an hour trying to call...

Regan: ... Blain...

Blain: She can't be... I mean... She wouldn't give up just like that... She ju-... She just can't be...

Regan: Well... When I called my girlfriend, she was still at home... And... I told her to flee... She said she was going with a few others, so I told her to come over here... She arrived last night, and hasn't been awake since... I stayed with her until she fell asleep... And I'm just waiting for her to wake up... So... Don't worry... She'll be here... You'll see... She'll be fine...

Blain: Yeah...

Then it stayed quiet for a while...

Blain: So which one's you're girlfriend...?

Regan: The one with the crimson curls...

Blain: ... She's pretty... You oughtta considerate yourself lucky...

Regan: ... Yeah...

Not long after that, we closed the doors and continued our way to the lobby, where everyone else was. Some were asleep, but most of them were still awake. They were talking about the situation and what is exactly happening out there...

Regan: Any word?

Dreez: No sir... Communication is dead sir... TOC doesn't respond and all I get when I try to call command centre is static radio... And besides, looks like the satellite phone is gonna be dead in just a few days...

Regan: They cut off communication so that we can't regroup or to plan a counter attack against them... These frackers sure know a lot about every move we make...

Logan: You think we got a snitch somewhere sir?

Regan: Naah, I'm not saying that... But... It seems kinda suspicious...

Blain: So what exactly has been happening the last few weeks...?

Reno: Apparently... Some guy committed a coup on their ex-government...

Regan: Which also happened to be the head of GUN...

Tavish: All I know is that he didn't liked the way humans lived. Very poor without proper education and shoot. Hell they fight over clothes, so what do you expect?

Blain: So did the coup succeed?

Jarod: That's the strange thing. As far as I heard, it didn't succeed...

Rico: But he's very powerful... Has made a lot of friends and enemies...

Logan: Yeah, that's true, that slipped my mind.

Jarod: Yeah but... If the coup didn't succeed, how come GUN was still able to cross the line...?

Blain: Depends on the type of government. They call it a Junta.

Logan: A what?

Blain: Junta. It's a type of government where the military decides what's best.

Jarod: Yeah but why was it ever established?

Tavish: Politics.

Jarod: Huh?

Tavish: After the first war ended 23 years ago, the humans founded the GUN and ICA organisations. The reason why they founded it and why GUN rules supreme is because it was a very hectic period for them. A government couldn't deal with the bloody situation that was happening while we were living in peace and prosperity as they were waging civil wars and riots. And after all those years, it still was ruled by GUN.

Logan: Yeah but, why now? That really bothers me...

Reno: I know for certain that even GUN had restrictions... I guess they got so fed up with the situation that they just didn't give a shoot no more. And that they started without permission or something. Because let's face it. These guys are heavily armed. No one can take them on. GUN has a lot of enemies, but no one can touch them... No one is stupid enough to assault them...

Jarod: Dreez, any word of how many cities got invaded...?

Dreez: ... A lot...

Jarod: Casualties...?

Dreez: A lot...

Jarod: *sighs*

Blain: Any word of Deberan...?

Dreez: As a matter a fact, I did... I got radioed by a friend of mine who was stationed with the 302nd near Deberan...

Blain: ... And...?

Dreez: Last night, there were heavy fights in and around the city... But... They had to retreat... There are a lot of civilian casualties...

Blain: Anyone made it out alive...?

Dreez: No, I'm sorry... People who were on the run got hit by the gunfire... He reported that no civilians got out alive...

I kept staring into blank space when I heard that... It's... I don't know... I felt I was gonna cry or something... And that isn't really something I wanna show... As they kept on talking, I retreated to a room and sat on a bed. Whatever hope I had left that Nicole was still alive got shattered to pieces and it only got worse as I stared at her picture... And... The longer I stared at it, the emptier I felt on the inside... I wish I told her goodbye... Gave her one last hug... One last kiss... One last stare in her dark purple eyes...

That night while I was in bed, I kept her picture close... I talked to her in my mind, like she could

actually hear me... I only wished it could talk back and comforted me to deal with such a great loss... But... Nothing that night could have comfort me... It was only then I realized how much she means to me, and how precious she was... But I took it for granted that she always was there and now she just isn't... I guess you don't know what you're missing until it's not there anymore... And then I realized how sorry I am for not telling her how much I loved her, how much she means to me... It's been a very long time since I've shed a tear, but that night, I cried my eyes out without a sound... Sometimes you hear stories of people who recently lost a loved one, appearing in a dream... I wished I had that... I wish I could see her in my dream that night... But she never came... And maybe that's why I began to think she's better off right now than to witness all those horrors that are being seen outside... Maybe it was selfish of me to think I wanted to be with her... Because if you really love someone, you'll let her go, especially if it's something when you don't want her to experience... But that didn't help me that night...

7 - Lead the way...

The night that was following after we left our village was a scary one... Probably the scariest night I've ever experienced. We were with a group of around 40 people and on the way we got picked up by MNAF troops. I think they weren't too happy to see us, because they had whole other things to take care off. We only slowed them down. But they took us in anyway. As we were walking through the streets, orders were barked around saying we had to retreat. I looked at the towns square as we passed by and it was nothing more then just piles of rubble. The buildings were devastated and there wasn't much left that was recognizable... Suddenly, without warning, gunshots filled the air and I heard bullets whizzing by as everyone made their way out of the city. A lot of people got shot down as all of us got separated in the chaos. I lost sight of everyone else and the only one that was with me was some Doberman,, who was am MNAF soldier. He didn't say much but just pulled me along in cover as we made our way through the city... Many, many hours later, the sun was coming up and we were far away from the city... We were safe... For now...

I fell down exhausted, trying to catch my breath again... That Doberman just looked around to see if any threats were close by. At some point, he sighed and sat down next to me...

Doberman: ... What a shooty mess...

Nicole: Yeah...

Doberman: You ok?

Nicole: *nods*

I had to sink everything in... Everything looked so surreal of the things that were happening the last few weeks... I closed my eyes and sighed, while thinking about everyone else... Then I thought about Blain...

Not long after that, I heard him searching for something. The sounds of things rattling against each other were heard, and as I looked up, I noticed that Terry was looking in his backpack, searching for something. He mumbled inarticulately that he found it. It sounded like 'Ha, found it...' He held up two bottles of water and passed one on to me.

Doberman: You gotta drink something. Keep it.

Nicole: Thanks...

Doberman: Want one?

Then he held a chocolate bar... He tossed one to me...

Doberman: I'm sorry I can't offer you anything else, but...

Nicole: That's ok... Thanks for getting me out...

Doberman: Don't mention it.

Nicole: So... What's gonna happen next?

Doberman: Truth be told, I have no idea...

Nicole: Ooh...

Doberman: All we can do is to keep moving to Azerbaijan. There's an underground base there and I hope the others are there as well.

Nicole: I see...

I remember Azerbaijan... I learned that in school when I was a kid... Back in ancient times, where humans were the dominant species on the planet, Azerbaijan was a country. It was near the Caspian Sea and the country was small, compared to their neighbours Iran, Georgia, and Russia. During the war that the humans waged back then, everything got annihilated completely. But after the war was over, survivors went west and founded a city, named after their country to pay respect and to keep their honour and all that. And ever since then, it was populated with humans and over the centuries, the name stayed the same...

It stayed silent for a while...

Doberman: The sun's coming up...

Nicole: Yeah...

Doberman: We'll have to wait until nightfall if we wanna move on. It's much safer at night.

Nicole: I see... What are we gonna do 'till then?

Doberman: Getting some shut eye. We'll just have to find something.

So we walked for about half an hour until we noticed an abandoned little shed. Its very small, but just the right size for the both of us. It was a lot of mess and the place smelled really bad, but I guess I had no other choice. Terry took off his backpack and placed it on the floor. He walked around the shed to look for something, and after a while, he came back.

Doberman: All clear.

Nicole: What if they come when we're asleep...?

Doberman: Don't worry... Just get some sleep ok?

Nicole: *nods* So... Are you staying anonymous or... Do you have a name?

Doberman: ... Terry... My name is Terry.

Nicole: I'm Nicole...

As soon as I got down and placed my head on one of the blankets and closed my eyes, I fell asleep almost immediately...

That night, I got shook awake gently. As I opened my eyes slowly, I saw flashes of light through the openings of the wooden shed... It was nightfall again... Guess I've been sleeping through the day...

Terry: Pssst...! ...Nicole...!! wake up...! Come on...! Wake up...!

Nicole: Huh...?

Terry: Something is coming this way.

Nicole: Oh no...

Terry: Get under those blankets...! Come on, move it...!

He pushed me down under those blankets and I made myself as small as possible. There were some crates as well, but I tried to move a bit behind it. I didn't know what Terry was gonna do. Not long after that, we heard boots walking on mud as all sorts of vehicles passed by. At some point, I heard the door slowly opening as a flashlight was shining through. I could see through the blankets a posture of a human... Then the sounds of soldiers and vehicles passing by slowly died off... He shines around with the flashlight and shortly after, I heard a click and the flashlight died out... I sighed in relief and thought he left... So I moved... Which... Was a stupid mistake... I heard that click again and this time, he was shining right on me... I could hear the footsteps getting closer... He got down and slowly lifts up the blanket while I could see the silhouette of his weapon... Then I stared directly in that flashlight and in the barrel of his weapon... My eyes were wide open as I was terrified... And I noticed that I was barely breathing... He reaches out a hand to help me get up...

Soldier: ... Hey, you alrig-

Then all of a sudden, Terry jumped up from behind him. He punched him and kicked him, and rolled around on the floor struggling with him. Terry bit the human's hand and while the human yelled in pain, Terry muffled his mouth and grabbed his knife. He stabbed him in the chest...

Soldier: Jason? Is that you?

Terry: shoot...!

Soldier: ... Jason?!

He pushed me behind those crates again and pulled the blanket over me again as he waited near the door. As soon as the human walked through, Terry grabbed him in a headlock and stabbed him in the back. At that point, I got up and Terry looked at me, dropping the human as he pulled the knife out of his back. The human gasped for air and stumbled towards the wall and collapsed. The soldier was still alive, but he stared at Terry and me... Terry wiped his knife clean and kneeled before him...

Nicole: No... Don't... Please... No more...

Then there was this awful eerie silence as he kept on staring at that human...

Terry: She just saved your life...

Terry walked out of the door while I continued staring at that human while a puddle of blood underneath him grows larger by the second... At some point, the glance in his eyes faded away as the life in his eyes died out... And then he just stopped breathing... I took a last look at the two human corpses before I left for good... Not long after that, I ran out of the shed and followed Terry...

It stayed silent for a long time as we were walking through the dark forests... I didn't know what to say... Or what to do... At some point, he stops. Terry took off his backpack and got out a little flashlight and a map. He holds his hand in front of the flashlight and shined on the map. Then he got out his compass...

Terry: You see any signs or landmarks here...?

Nicole: What...?

Terry: *sighs* Never mind.

He tried to figure out which way to go. But seems to me we got lost or something. He kept going over the map with his index finger, to find out the coordinates and every now and then, he checks the compass.

Terry: Ok, I think I figured it out... There should be an intersect a few kilometres North West. If we follow that road, we'll come across a little town called Remington. So keep you're eyes open as well... If you see something, lemme know...

Nicole: Ok...

Terry: Let's go...

He puts out the flashlight and placed everything back in his backpack. And then we started walking again...

I couldn't keep my mind of those humans Terry has killed... As soon as that one stared at me, I just didn't know what to do... Once that spark of life died out in his eyes, I was scared... I've seen people

dieing before, and every time I see it again, it scares me... It gives an uncertain feeling and leaves you feel empty on the inside... But the truth was, I kept seeing it... No matter how many times I closed my eyes and tried to look away, I kept seeing it...

I noticed I fell behind. He walked up just ahead of me not that far away, so I pick up the pace and walked a little faster. But at some point, I felt scared. It felt like we were being watched or something... I saw shadows moving along the trees, and I didn't know if it was my imagination or not. I kept looking terrified as the feeling didn't go away...

Terry: What's wrong with you?

Nicole: I- I think we're being watched...

Terry: Did you see any humans...?

Nicole: ... I don't think so...

Terry: We better get going before-

Then all of a sudden, someone jumped up from behind on Terry, and started to punch him. Terry managed to kick the guy off of him and they started fighting as I tried to stay away from it... At some point, the guy managed to grab Terry's gun and aimed at him as Terry got out his rifle. The guy shot him in his leg and Terry fell down. Then he walked up towards him and kicked the rifle out of his hands and he still aimed at Terry... It was too dark to see who it was, but as soon as he came in the moonlight I saw it was... A hedgehog...?

Hedgehog: MNAF troops got no jurisdiction here... So I'll ask you this only once... What's your business here...?

Terry: Are you frackin' insane?! We're on the same team here!!

Then the hedgehog presses his foot against Terry's wound... And Terry yelled in pain...

Hedgehog: I think I didn't make myself clear just then... *presses harder*

Terry: *pants* Ow!! frack!! I heard you the first time!! I'm not a frackin' retard!!

Hedgehog: Then I shall talk real slowly just encase you are... What is your business here...?

???: Mahabi...

As I looked to my right, I saw another hedgehogs coming out of the bushes... He was green, and wears a red bandana, but that wasn't that made him stand out. It was his tail. He had a tail like a cat and as I looked closer, I noticed he had two of 'em. Then I looked back at the hedgehog that was standing

near Terry and he had a bandana and had a cat like tail as well... A dark blue tail that ends in a grey fluff... And he was yellow with dark blue streaks on his quills... The one with the two tails said Mahabi to the hedgehog standing near Terry... And of course I was scared shootless... Why would he attack an MNAF soldier...?

???: Go cool off...

Mahabi: GUN, ICA, MNAF!! Their all the same, Lattei!! We can't let them-

Lattei: Killing one doesn't make a difference and can not undo what's done. Go.

Mahabi: ... Fine.

Then that Mahabi guy walked towards a tree and leaned against it as he glared at us... Then that Lattei guy walked up to me... He took a quick look in my eyes and frowned at me, but then recovered his expression as he held out a hand to help me get up. I guess he must have seen the scared expression on my face...

Lattei: My apologies, miss...

Then I grabbed his hand as he pulled me up... I couldn't stop staring at those tails though...

Nicole: ... Are you like... A mutant or something...?

Lattei: No, although I'm quite sure they will say that...

Mahabi: Ok, enough...

Lattei: Mahabi...

Mahabi: Don't patronize me, Lattei... Like you don't wanna know...

Then Lattei started thinking... He walks up to Terry and kneeled before him...

Lattei: Tell me something... Why is it that you two are in the middle of nowhere...?

Terry: It's because we got driven out!! Do you even know what's going on out there?!!

Lattei: All too well... That's why I wanna know what you're doing here...

Terry: You don't even know me!! What the hell do you want from me?!!

Lattei: You're wearing a uniform... You're wearing a uniform of those who want us dead the most...

Terry: The hell?!! MNAF is on you're side dipshoot!! THEY are the good guys!!

Lattei: Define good... Most of us got hunted down like dogs for decades by the MNAF...

Then all of a sudden, I remembered. I remember more then 23 years ago, that there were still groups pillaging shortly after the war was over... Could they be...?

Lattei: It doesn't matter to us if there is a war... It's every day life as usual... So if you're not with the MNAF, say it now...

Terry: Or what?!!

Lattei: ...

Terry: If you're making a threat, make sure you're doing it righ-!!

Then all of a sudden, Lattei punched Terry in his face. He took a closer look at Terry and rolled up his sleeves... He took a look at his arms and turned away...

Lattei: You're not with the MNAF...

Terry: What...?

Lattei: Mahabi, let's go.

Terry: Wait, what?!

Lattei: You're uniform.

Terry: Yeah? What about it?

Lattei: If you're with the MNAF, then where are you're ID tags and logo's?

Terry: *sighs*

Nicole: Wait, wait... What's this all about...?

Then Lattei and Mahabi looked at me...

Mahabi: We never lived the life you had...

Lattei: Always got chased down like dogs by the MNAF... And now the GUN and ICA is after us as well...

Nicole: Yeah but... We're at war with GUN...

Lattei: Officially, it's not even a war... But I think you're friend can tell us more about it...

Nicole: Whadda ya mean...?

Lattei: He's not someone you think he is...

Nicole: Terry...? What's he talking about...?

Terry: *sighs* ... It's best for you not to know...

Nicole: ...

Terry: Trust me...

Nicole: ...

Terry: *sighs*

Nicole: Please...

Terry: You sure you wanna know?

Nicole: Yes...

Terry: You can get shot if they found out you know...

Nicole: I can get shot everywhere...

Terry: *sighs*

Nicole: ...

Terry: It was the first time the government had ordered an assassination ever since the war... That was 14 years ago... Intel reported Robotnik was still alive and that he proposed a threat to civilisation... Mainly to us... So he had to be taken out quickly... I had to get the job done... No loose ends, and no chance of starting a war... I had to make sure he was dead... I did the job with another guy, but I still don't know his name... But unlike him, I wasn't a gun for hire. I was part of Special Forces that officially didn't even exist... We had to take care of problems that just didn't seem to go away after the war was over... That guy was a part of my group but how he got in, no one knows. And he was the one firing the rifle... We got chased down by some human called Zakhaev with a band of highly trained special forces commando's ever since... And at some point, I thought about my own safety and bailed on him... That mission put me in danger as well...

Nicole: I see...

Terry: Yeah...

Lattei: Is there any particular reason why you guys got chased down?

Terry: No idea... It seems they were only after him, because he was the one that fired that fatal shot on Robotnik...

Then it got me thinking. It didn't make any sense. If the other guy got chased down by this Zakhaev guy, why wouldn't they be after him? I think they weren't just after that guy just because he shot Robotnik... There's more behind it... Then I thought about the stories that Blain told me a long time ago. Stories about conspiracies and betrayal during the war. And then it got me thinking again...

Nicole: Is there a possibility that the guy you worked with was created by Robotnik...?

Terry: ... No idea... Why?

Nicole: Because... My boyfriend was... And he was part of some Special Forces group created by Robotnik... He told me stories that he was hunted down as well during the first war...

Terry: Why?

Nicole: He didn't know...

Terry: Oh... Is he still alive...?

Nicole: ... No... He died a few weeks ago...

Terry: Oh... I'm sorry to hear that...

Nicole: Yeah...

Then it stayed quiet for a while...

Terry: How'd you know...?

Lattei: Know what?

Terry: That I wasn't with the MNAF?

Lattei: You got a tattoo on your wrist. The symbol represents the organisation you work for and there is nothing that can identify you.

Terry: Yeah but... How'd you found out it's from them?

Lattei: I've encountered them before...

Nicole: How'd you get the uniform then if you're not with the MNAF...?

Terry: I found a dead MNAF soldier once... So I took his uniform and looked for surviving MNAF troops... I pretended to be a survivor from some regiment. They didn't complain though, they could use all the help they could get...

Lattei: ... Right...

Terry: Keep in mind that this stays between us... If something ever gets leaked out... Well, you know... Heh, I'd be dead before I can say "peanut butter jelly sandwiches"...

Mahabi: ... Don't act so paranoid... What can we do? Like we're going over to GUN and say that you were a culprit on the hit of Robotnik? Pssh, yeah right. They would shoot us if they had a chance...

Terry: You're right...

Nicole: ... So what's your story...?

Lattei: ... Ever since I can remember we get chased down... Our only way for survival is to pillage, and sometimes take a life if we have to... We got no place to call home. Forever roaming the planet, constantly on the run for things we fear the most. I've seen everyone die over the years. And now this...?

Nicole: So... Basically, you're kinda like a pirate...?

Lattei: ... Something like that, yeah...

Mahabi: shoot's just getting worse by the day...

Nicole: Well... You can come with us...

Terry: What?!!

Nicole: Yeah! I mean, we got more chance of survival if you tag along... Four know more then two...

Terry: After he shot me?!

Mahabi: Hey...

Nicole: Well at least he knows how to handle a weapon... So what's the plan? You tell me...

Terry: How about fixing me leg first? It's bleeding severely and hurts like hell.

Lattei: Lemme take a look.

Then he kneeled before Terry and looked at his leg...

Lattei: The bullet went right through. You're lucky it didn't hit the bone or any arteries. It's just a flesh wound. You got any medical equipment?

Terry: Check my backpack.

Lattei was messing around in Terry's backpack and got out a bandage. He wrapped it around Terry's leg and then faced Mahabi and holds up his hand.

Lattei: ... Spit.

Mahabi: *spits in Lattei's hand*

Lattei: No, stupid, I mean spit out you're chewing gum!! *wipes hand clean on Mahabi's chest fluff*

Mahabi: ... *spits out chewing gum*

He stretches the chewing gum and carefully placed it underneath the bandage layer. He pressed on to the bandage and held it like that for a while. Then Lattei walked over to a tree and snapped a thick branch like if it's a toothpick or something. He gives the branch to Terry, and Terry leaned on it to get up.

Terry: ... Thanks...

Lattei: Don't mention it... So where are you heading...?

Terry: Azerbaijan...

Lattei: That's a long way...

Terry: We better get moving then...

Lattei: ... Lead the way...

8 - You would've known...

I couldn't sleep all night... Neither could I during the day. My mattress got soaked with tears. All night I've been staring at Nicole's picture not knowing what to think. My hands never stopped shaking after hearing the message. Slowly but steady, I felt sorrow made room for anger, and the more I thought about it, the angrier I got. Something precious that went to waste just like that. I didn't understand. And because I didn't understand, it made me angry. Then at some point, I opened my eyes and everything was just gone. No more sorrow. There was only hate... One whole day passed by with nothing happening... I didn't even know the time, but as I looked, I saw it was night and thought that the time passed really slowly...

Regan: Sergeant!

I looked up and noticed Regan standing in the doorway. I quickly wiped my eyes and looked at him...

Blain: What ya got Regan?

Regan: Nothing good worth to mention. Follow me. We got a lot of things to do.

So I got up and grabbed my gear. The picture of Nicole was placed in my pocket again, and I walked outside. It was a chilly night in September... A bit of a depressing night... No moon, just grey clouds with a few stars... I called out my squad and we all assembled near some crates.

Regan: Guys, listen up. Recon One contacted an hour ago. He's scattered about 14 kilometres away from our position. Recon One reported infantry of around 2500 enemy troops mobilizing. According to him, their regiments are being dispatched and going separate ways, and one of them is heading our way. Heavily armed, escorted by unknown amount of armour.

Reno: So what you're saying is, is that we have to retreat, sir?

Regan: No. What I'm saying is, is that we should make our way to Robotropolis while we still can and leave two Recon's here that can provide us with information. If we can, we'll take them on and get their supplies.

Jarod: Robotropolis...? Isn't that a human city...?

Blain: Yes, it is... Except it's abandoned for years...

Regan: Exactly...

Tavish: What about the civilians, sir?

Regan: We'll take them with us. The safest way is that we team up in a group of 2 or 3 and take two civilians along as we all take separate routes to Robotropolis. That way, we're making sure we take the least risk. If you encounter trouble on the way, make sure you get a clean shot before firing. The best thing is to avoid a fire fight at all.

Blain: ... Sounds good.

Regan: Questions?

All: No sir.

Regan: Notify everyone and get you're things. We're leaving in 5 minutes.

Not long after that, all of the civilians got to together and got assigned to two of us. I went with Jarod, and two civilians went with us. Then we all made our way to Robotropolis...

We went off in different directions, trying to get the shortest route. We went through the forests and no one talked. We had to duck a few times, believing we were seeing something but it turned out to be an animal or moving branches that projected shadows on the trees. About 5 hours later, we finally arrived...

Walking through the deserted streets of Robotropolis was hard. I haven't been here in years and all sorts of memories speed by... The whole city was destroyed and not many buildings were still standing. Everywhere you looked, you saw wrecks of destroyed droids, tank wrecks, vehicle wrecks, and bullet holes in walls reminded me what was happening here a long time ago. And that I was a part of it. It sends chills down my spines as the only sounds we heard were our footsteps.

Blain: Take a look at that Jarod...

Jarod: Yeah... Ever seen anything like it before...?

Blain: ... As a matter of fact, I have...

Jarod: Something similar, sir...?

Blain: No, the exact same place...

Jarod: You've been here before ...?

Blain: Yeah... Imagine... Fifty thousand people used to here... Now it's a ghost town...

Jarod: ... Yeah...

As we were walking through the dark streets, I couldn't help but to feel a little nervous. With every street we passed, we looked around to see if we could see any threats, but it was all clear...

Not a living soul in this whole forsaken city... No wind, not even a little breeze... No sound whatsoever... And that's what made me nervous...

Jarod: Sir...

Blain: What is it Jarod?

Jarod: You hear that...?

Blain: What...?

Jarod: Ssh...

We stopped dead in our tracks... Jarod ears went upright and twitched every now and then as he suspiciously looked around. I took a look at the two civilians that were just standing there, looking a bit uneasy. I haven't really took a good look at them, and they weren't really the types you would notice, although one of 'em was two heads bigger then me... She was a lioness, so I didn't really know how I couldn't notice her. And the other one was girl as well. A hedgehog. Light blue, with brown streaks going down her quills and she wore yellow glasses. And all this time, they haven't said anything...

Jarod: Gunship inbound.

Blain: Oh shoot! Go!!

At that point, a gunship flew by fast... There was no time for us to run, otherwise it would have seen us... We got as low as possible to the ground and moved very slowly towards a wreck. Luckily, the gunship moved on...

Lioness: You think we're safe...?

Jarod: Wait, wait...

Jarod peeks over the wreck...

Jarod: He's making a one eighty turn...

Blain: Stay low, he might have not noticed us...

Jarod: He's coming closer...

Blain: Stay put...

Jarod: He noticed us...

Blain: Stay down Jarod...

Jarod: Yeah, he noticed us.

At that point, the gunship fired its weapons at the wreck, with the intention of driving us out from

behind it. We didn't fell for that, until the gunship got behind the wreck... And I swear, we were staring directly at the cannons... At that point, we ran like frack... Sprint my legs out of my @\$\$. The lioness and the hedgehog got pushed in a small alley where the gunship couldn't go, while Jarod and I distracted the gunship. At some point, we reached a dead end and the gunship was flying towards us... Then all of a sudden, a massive shot was heard and for a second there, I thought I saw the cockpit of the gunship being splattered with blood... It started to sway and it hit one of the buildings. It continues to sway as it kept on colliding with buildings and at some point, it lost his tail and started to spin around. I pulled Jarod away and stayed as low as possible as the spinning gunship hit the ledge of a roof and took some concrete with it... It flipped up side down and made its way to the ground... A couple of hundred meters in front of us...

Jarod: ... What the *pants* hell... *pants*

Blain: ... *pants* You don't see that- *pants* Every day... *pants*

Jarod: *pants* What happened that made it crash...?

Blain: ... Let's find out... *pants*

Jarod and I got out our weapons and went towards the crashed gunship. I grabbed my shotgun from my back and placed a few rounds in it. It makes this particular noise when you cock it. It sounds like "Klick Klack" and noticed an empty shell ejected... I didn't know it back then but... I was about to do something that I haven't done in years...

Jarod: Holy shoot... Look...

Blain: What?

Jarod: The pilot got shot down... It's got a bullet hole in the glass...

Blain: Yeah...

Jarod: Who shot him...?

Then we heard the co-pilot grunting... He crawled out of the cockpit with a lot of pain and effort and we noticed his leg was dislocated, along with other wounds he had... Jarod and I stared at him... Something just snapped inside of me all of a sudden... I felt that hate again... The more I thought about it, the angrier I became... I placed the barrel of the shotgun against the human's head...

Jarod: Sarge, no...

Blain: He doesn't deserve to live Jarod... No one will miss him... You think it's fair that he shot at us with the intention to kill all four of us...?

Jarod: No but...

Blain: Jarod.

Jarod: Yes sir?

Blain: Go find the two civilians and get them safe.

Jarod: But-

Blain: Do it, that's an order.

Jarod: Yes sir...

Then he walked off as I still aimed at that human... And there was nothing I felt... No regrets... No remorse... No compassion... I saw the scared look in his face but I just couldn't give a frack... As soon as he reaches out for something, I squeezed the trigger... It made an ear deafening noise as his face got hit with 8 lead balls... His head just splattered apart... There wasn't much left of his face after that... He fell down onto the ground... Chunks of flesh and chips of bone were everywhere... I heard a "Klick Klack" again and a shell ejected... It fell down on the ground and that made a particular sound... The red and yellow shotgun shell hit the ground as it still smokes... And I walked away without looking back... And that was the first life I took ever since... Many more would follow...

Twenty three years... It took me twenty three years to change into the person I became... You know how long it took to change back...? Two days... Only two days... I wanted retribution for what they've done to me... Eye for an eye... I had to settle a score... It's because they took Nicole's life... I thought it would help me... To get my revenge... But it didn't... Because no matter how many humans I was going to kill in the years following, the score never reached anywhere that Nicole was worth... Five hundred, a thousand, ten thousand... It never gets near... Humans are worthless...

I was walking through the streets, staring in blank space. Then all of a sudden, I felt an arm shaking my shoulder. I turned around and aimed my shotgun at someone... Took me a moment to realize it was Jarod with the two civilians...

Jarod: Whoa!! Sarge!! It's me!!

Blain: ...

Jarod: You ok?!

Blain: *nods*

Jarod: Come on... Let's go find the others...

Robotropolis is a very big city to cross... It's easy to get lost... I tried my best to remember every street but it wasn't easy. We couldn't find them. The city was just too big... At some point, we gave up searching and decided to look again in the morning... I took us to my "home" to spend the night... And everything was shot to pieces... As soon as that lioness and hedgehog fell asleep, Jarod and I took a walk through the large building... Because there was no electricity, we looked around with flashlights. Every inch of that building came back... And at some point, we arrived at the cryochambers... This is where it was all happening... I was created in this very same room...

Jarod: ... Cryochambers...?

Blain: Yeah...

Jarod: Whoever did this must have been one sick frack... It's like playing as Mother Nature...

Blain: In some way, he was...

Jarod: ... Who...?

I didn't answer his question... I saw a cryochamber with a steel plate... I wiped the dust off it...

Blain: Epsilon 939... "Tyrone"...

Jarod: ... All of them were created...?

Blain: ... Yeah...

Jarod: Ooh...

Then I moved over to another chamber... I wiped the plate...

Blain: Epsilon 345... "Cyrus"...

Jarod: ... So... Their all dead...?

Blain: Yeah... All but one...

Jarod: Then where's he...?

Then I wiped the plate next to it... And it was my plate...

Blain: Epsilon 223... "Blain"...

Jarod: What...?

Blain: Yeah...

Jarod: Whoa, wait a sec... You're telling me you're created... Sir...?

Blain: *nods*...

Jarod: Including that whole... RRTS thing...?

Blain: *nods*

Jarod: ... Holy frack...

Blain: So now you know... How much is in the pot...?

Jarod: Excuse me sir?

Blain: The pot, how much money does it have in total...?

Jarod: Eeh, 560 dinar in total sir...

Blain: Well, I told you that my origin lies with the RRTS... So... How about you and me split the pot and call it even...?

Jarod: Works fine with me sir...

Blain: Hehe...

Then I noticed a few other pods...

Blain: Whoa... Waaaaaaaait a minute...

Jarod: What?

Blain: More pods...

Jarod: ... So?

Blain: Something isn't right...

Then I wiped the plates and looked at it...

Blain: Sigma-Alpha 214... "Ayden"...

Jarod: ...

Blain: Sigma-Alpha 387... "Jag"...

Jarod: The poor bastard never made it. There's a skeleton in there...

Blain: Yeah... Except this one is forced open... Look...

Jarod: It's all broken...

Then I wiped the plate on the broken chamber...

Blain: ... Sigma-Alpha 301... "Scyth"...

???: I knew you'd be back one day...

Hearing that voice so all of a sudden freaked us out... We aimed our weapons to the location where we heard the voice, and as soon as we shined our flashlights at it, I saw it was a hedgehog... A dark red one, with dark skin coloured furpatch and similar patterns as me. His patterns were dark blue, like my fur colour and he had three ear rings in his left ear. He was covered in scars and even a huge burn mark could be seen on one of his back quills. He holds a massive sniper rifle as he slowly walked towards us... He wipes the plate of the chamber as well as we looked at him...

Hedgehog: Sigma-Alpha 301 is something I haven't heard in years... It's always either "Get that fracktard!!" or "Make sure he's dead this time!!" Scyth is something some people address me by... But only if they know me... And as for the others... I'm like a ghost...

We stared a long time at him...

Scyth: Yup... Believe it...

Blain: So what's your story...?

Scyth: My story...? My story is exactly the same as yours, except they never stopped hunting me down... You can say I'm a long lost brother of yours...

Blain: Wait, what?

Scyth: I'm glad I finally found... I know there are more... Where are they...? You know where they are...?

Blain: Epsilon 939 and Epsilon 345 died in combat a long time ago... There's one being dead in the cryochambers and I don't know what happened to the other one...

He sits down on one of the cryochambers and sighed as he placed his rifle next to him. He looked a little desperate to say the least, and for a second there, I think he was actually gonna cry...

Scyth: *sighs* We're never gonna make it...

Blain: What are you talking about...?

Scyth: You don't know what it's all about, do you?

Blain: ... No.

Scyth: Come on, follow me... I think you and I need a little chat...

Blain: Look... Talk to me tomorrow... We need our sleep... We encountered trouble on the way and we're really tired...

Scyth: ... As you will. Keep in mind that time is running out for you...

At that point, he walked away... And although I was anxious to know what he was talking about, I skipped it. I wanted to sleep first. I was still baffled by the fact that there is another one... And the strange thing is... How come I never knew Cyrus, Tyrone and me weren't the only ones...? I'll guess I'll hear it the next day...

Jarod and I made our way back to the lioness and that hedgehog, who were still asleep. Not long after that, Jarod fell asleep just like that, but I couldn't... I felt oh so miserable all of a sudden... I saw that gruesome image of that human I shot earlier this night... And it kept on haunting me... At some point, I got Nicole's picture again and started talking to her while I almost choked down in tears...

Blain: ... I... I killed someone today Nicole... It's... It's something I haven't done in years... *sighs* And... I... I-I don't know what to do... It's... *sighs* Do-Does it make me a bad person...? I... I don't know... I-... You would've know wh-what to do... I wish you were here... I... I wish you told me what to do... But... No matter how hard I try, I can't hear you're voice... I... I can't see you... I... *sighs* I-I wish you were here... You

would've known...

Then I couldn't hold myself any longer as tears flowed down...

Blain: You would've known...

9 - Bubblegum, sunglasses and bottles of water...

After walking for hours through the night, we reached a small town called Remington. It took way longer than we intended to, because Terry's leg was wounded. Once we arrived at the suburbs of the city, there was not a living soul in the wide area. Walking through that little town in search of people turned out to be a disappointment... The whole city was abandoned... At some point, we gave up searching... We stopped at a playground that was surrounded by houses... I sat on a swing and stared blankly into space as I swayed a little...

Terry: *sighs* I could have sworn this would work... We wasted a whole day...

Nicole: It's not your fault Terry. You couldn't have known...

Terry: Yeah I know but... Still... I'm out of supplies...

Mahabi: ... Then we raid the houses...

Terry: What?

Mahabi: It's not like we never raided or something...

Lattei: Yeah, and besides, everything is deserted...

Terry: We should only take the necessary stuff.

Lattei: What you need?

Terry opened up his backpack and got all sorts of stuff out. But it wasn't much...

Terry: Water... We need water the most. A lighter that works. Mine doesn't work no more. Eeh... Rope could be useful. Medical supplies. Food... Ehm... Just about anything that can be useful. Take as much as you can, but only the necessary stuff.

Lattei: Mahabi and I will go west.

Terry: Nicole and I will look around the east side. Don't wander off too far. We'll meet up here in an hour.

Lattei: M'kay. Let's go.

Terry: You know how to handle weapons?

Mahabi: I do!

Terry: ... I don't trust you with weapons.

Lattei: He's the only one who knows how to handle one.

Terry: ... Catch. *tosses sidearm to Mahabi*

Mahabi: Sweet! A SigSauer M9!!

Terry: I want that back though.

Mahabi: Aww...

So we set out to look for stuff. Terry and I moved around the houses and looked through the windows to

see if anything was left standing. Most of the houses were somewhat empty, but I noticed in one of the houses that the TV was static... So that means there is still electricity. And maybe we could find out what's been happening out there... We went inside the house as Terry looked upstairs for stuff. And I just looked at the TV being static. I switched channel but it was all static... Just when I wanted to give up, it changed to a channel that was deformed and the sound wasn't really that bright either. But that wasn't the reason that got me worried. It was the message that it was bringing...

TV: What appears-...- Explosions in epic proportions -.....- So far, estimated casualties -.....- 241 million -...- 2 missiles with 6 nuclear warheads -...-

Nicole: Terry!! You gotta see this!!!

Then Terry ran downstairs and peeked through the door.

Terry: What?!! What's wrong?!!

Nicole: Look...

The image was very vague, but you say a map of the world where the nuclear warheads impacted. Two hit Buthainah... The rest hit the eastern border and the west... It's known that most of the MNAF troops were stationed there, guiding civilians to safer ground. A so called extraction point to get them to Buthainah... We didn't know what to say really... Their all dead...

Terry: That's...

Nicole: Unbelievable... If... If I stayed in Buthainah, I'd be dead...

Terry: Aah... So that explains you're funny accent...

Nicole: Terry I'm serious...

Terry: Sorry luv.

Nicole: ... *sighs* Le-Let's just go...

Then we continued our way... We noticed some grocery store, which meant food. Terry got behind the counter and looked underneath it as I explored the aisles of the small shop. Crisps, deep fried section, bread... I stuffed myself until I couldn't eat no more, and believe me, that took a while. I was starved... I grabbed 4 large bottles of water off the shelf and took it with me. As I came back, Terry was still busy underneath the counter...

Nicole: Just what are you doing...?

Terry: Store owners got the nasty habit to keep weapons under the counter. Since the owner is gone, I think it's more useful to me.

Nicole: ... Right.

Terry: Except this frackin' vault won't budge. *punches it*

Nicole: No, that's gonna work.

Terry: Could always try.

Then I noticed a small note on the cash register. It had four digits...

Nicole: Try 4978.

I could hear he was turning the lock, and at some point, I heard a "click".

Terry: Hot damn! How'd you know?!

Nicole: ... It says right here.

Terry: Oh... Right... I knew that...

Nicole: Sure you did.

Terry: Alright, let's see... Aha!! Niiiiiiiiice...

Nicole: What?

Terry: Glock 21. Nine millimetres. Even an extra clip! And the dude's weapon license!

He took a look at the license...

Terry: "Frederik Reef"... What kind of a shooty name is that?

Nicole: It's a human's name.

Terry: So is yours.

Nicole: I know.

Terry: ... So is mine, actually, but I like your name.

Nicole: ... Right...

Terry: Alright, Glock's mine now.

Then I noticed a rack filled with sweets. Packs of bubblegum and all sorts.

Nicole: Gimme one of those, please.

Terry: What? These?

Nicole: No the bubblegum.

Terry: *places bubblegum on counter* That'll be 50 cents please.

Nicole: Cut it out Terry...

Terry: Alright then, 25 cents. You get a discount because you're so pretty.

Nicole: Damn it Terry!! Is everything just a joke to you?!!

Terry: Why?! What's your problem?!

Nicole: My problem?!! Every day, people are dieing out there!! My boyfriend died out there as well!! I don't know where my friends are!! I don't know where my little brother is!! So could you just stop trying to be funny?!! Because you're not helping me!!

In that sudden burst of anger, I smacked the cash register off the counter. I didn't know I was that strong, because that thing weights a lot. But it did impressed Terry... He closed his eyes and sighed...

Terry: ... Look... Nicole... I've seen friends of me dieing as well... And... Of course it's a hard thing to deal with but... It's something you just gotta accept... The sooner you'll accept that he's not here anymore... The better... So that you can leave it behind and move on... Just because there is a nuclear post-apocalyptic war being waged outside doesn't mean you can't have fun anymore... It's the only thing that got me through...

Nicole: Yeah but... I... I just miss him y-you know...?

Terry: I know...

Nicole: Few hours before he died, he called me... He... He said he loved me... And I said I loved him too... I just don't understand Terry... Just... Why is this happening...? It's just not fair...

Terry: I know... C'mere dudette...

He got from behind the counter and stretched his arms. I doubted for a moment but then I hugged him. And although it didn't really made me feel better, I was relieved. And I know he was right. But accepting the fact that the person you truly love from the bottom of your heart is being taken away from you so all of a sudden is a very hard thing to accept... But I have to... I started to cry as I hugged Terry and placed my chin on his shoulder... And we stood there for at least 15 minutes...

Terry: Alright, alright, dude, enough. You're soaking my jacket.

I couldn't resist a little smile...

Terry: You ok?

Nicole: Yeah... I am now...

Terry: Good... Alright, let's see what we got here.

Then he got behind the counter again and was messing around in the vault...

Terry: Alright, I got a pistol, and two clips. And some shotgun ammo as well. You see a shotgun here somewhere?

Nicole: ... No...

Terry: Figures. I'll take it anyway.

Then he got up and turned to a rack with sunglasses. Well, those cheap plastic ones anyway. He tries on a few and looked in the small mirror that was attached to it...

Terry: How do I look?

Nicole: You look dope...

Terry: Dope?? Dude, from which rock you crawled out from?! Dope isn't being said for years now!

Nicole: ... Guess I'm a little behind with slang...

Terry: A little? About twenty years behind!

Nicole: ... Well I'm forty one years old so that might explain...

Terry: ... Wait, what? Did my ears deceive me?

Nicole: Nope...

Terry: ... Forty one years old...?? Holy shoot... Say that again...

Nicole: ... Forty one years old...

Terry: Brrr.... *shivers*

Nicole: Then what did you think?

Terry: I don't know... Twenty two, twenty six years old... Twenty nine tops...

Nicole: Is that a compliment?

Terry: Hell yeah it is...

Nicole: ... Thanks...

Terry: ... You're not pulling my leg are you?

Nicole: No...

Terry: ... Well, I would have felt that if you pulled my right leg...

Nicole: ...

Terry: You serious...?

Nicole: Dead serious...

Terry: ... Damn!! You look good for a fossil...

Nicole: ... *weak smile* Gee, thanks.

Terry: ... Forty one years old... Damn...

Then he picked up the bubblegum that fell along with the cash register I smacked off earlier. He grabs a few other packs of bubblegum and placed it on the counter.

Terry: So... Paper or plastic?

Not long after that, we looked around the city again. We went into a hospital to get bandages and stuff and Terry just kept on joking. You know those plastic skeletons doctors have in their quarters? Well, he

moved it around and made it stick up the finger as he moved its jaw and talked in a high pitched voice. For the very first time since Blain died, I started to laugh again. Terry made me forget all the sorrow I felt...

As soon as we were done, we returned to the playground where we were at first and noticed Lattei and Mahabi were already waiting...

Terry: 'Sup guys! Ya found anything?!

Lattei: We did. A flashlight, bandages, bottles of water, food.

Mahabi: Money... *grins*

Terry: You do realize money is worthless right now right?

Mahabi: Maybe for us, but it can be used to bribe people... Or to buy equipment...

Terry: How much ya got?

Mahabi: Five hundred dinar...

Terry: Hehehe, jackpot...

Mahabi: Oh, which reminds me, I got something for you.

He searches his bag and got out some box and throws it to Terry. Terry catches it and looked at it surprised...

Mahabi: We ran into a pet shop.

Terry: Doggy biscuits??

Mahabi: Yeah... *chuckles*

Terry: ... *tastes one*

Mahabi: And?

Terry: *spits it out* How the hell are they able to feed this shoot to their dogs?!!

Mahabi: The advertisement in the window said it was delicious.

Terry: Then they obviously never tasted it before.

Then it stayed quiet for a while... We all sat down on something... I sat down on that swing again as Mahabi and Lattei kicked back on a bench and Terry sits on a fence...

Lattei: I wonder how the others are doing...

Nicole: Who?

Lattei: Everyone... Would they be as lucky as us...?

Nicole: Well I hope so...

Lattei: *sighs*

We stayed outside until dawn broke. Looking at the sunset above the deserted town with Terry, Mahabi and Lattei was an experience I won't forget very soon. It reminded me of the sunsets and sunrises I've seen together with Blain, and I still remember what he said back then...

"The sun rises and falls... And with it, goes another day... As soon as you saw the sun rising again, you know you're still alive and made it through the night..."

I never truly understood what he meant with that, but I do now. I felt I was gonna cry again... But this isn't the moment for me to shed my tears... Instead, I should be thankful that I was given the chance to have known a hedgehog named Blain... And I think it was then I accepted it... That Blain died... But... The fact that I accepted it didn't mean I will forget... He lives on in my heart as I struggle to survive...

At some point, we went towards one of the houses that were still intact. Terry and I dragged mattresses downstairs and found pillows and blankets as Mahabi and Lattei are gonna sleep upstairs. A little privacy wouldn't hurt so... Heh...

Terry: You're comfortable? *fluffs up Nicole's pillow*

Nicole: Yeah...

Terry: Hehe... I used to tug my little sister in like this...

Nicole: You're little sister?

Terry: Yeah... She's 9 years old...

Nicole: Ooh... Where is she now...?

Terry: She died... My whole family is dead...

Nicole: Ooh... I'm sorry to hear that...

Terry: ... Maybe it's best for them... So that they don't have to experience what we're experiencing...

Nicole: Maybe...

Terry: Heh...

Nicole: Truth be told...

Terry: What...?

Nicole: I'm glad that my daughter isn't witnessing this...

Terry: You're daughter...?

Nicole: Yeah...

Terry: You were a mommy...?

Nicole: *nods* I still am...

Terry: Can I ask what happened...?

Nicole: I had a miscarriage... I only held her for 10 minutes before she got taken away again... That was

the first and last time I held her... The next day, she died...

Terry: I'm sorry to hear that...

Nicole: Don't be...

Terry: *sighs*

Terry and I talked about all sorts of things. About the war... What we did before the war... About his girlfriend and my Blain... At some point, we fell asleep in the middle of a conversation... And I wished I could've seen Blain that night. Just one more time to say farewell... He never had the chance to say goodbye, but I still had... So I said goodbye to him...

10 - The truth about you...

Last night, we met up with the others. I only had sleep for 2 hours, but it was better than nothing. And once we did finally meet up with the others, I didn't show it, but I was really glad to see Tavish, Shifty and Rico. We managed to get some sleep, and as we woke up a few hours later, we ate and drank. It wasn't much, but hey. I introduced Scyth as a survivor Jarod and I found. No questions were asked, and I told Jarod that he shouldn't mention what Scyth and I really are...

Once we finally had enough rest, we set out on reconnaissance. Tavish, Shifty, Rico, Jarod, Scyth and me went out in the city as other "regiments" set out as well to look for threats. Scyth was walking behind Jarod, and I didn't know what really happened, but Jarod made all of a sudden a twitchy move. Then he fell down on the ground as a small puddle of blood was forming underneath him...

Jarod: Ow!! frack!!

Tavish: SNIPER!!!

We all ran behind and took cover behind walls and wrecks, not too far from Jarod. He looked at us...

Rico: Where's he shot sergeant?!! Can you see him?!! Sergeant!!

Tavish: Stay down Rico!! *pushes Rico against the wall*

Rico: Sergeant!!

Tavish: What the hell is the matter with you?!! Who's gonna take care of you when you get shot?!!

Huh?!!

Blain: Stay down Jarod!!

Scyth: Blain, you see him...?

Blain: No... Jarod was down before we heard the shot...

Scyth: I see him...

Blain: Where...?

Scyth: Near the wreck on top of the building, two o'clock...

Blain: There's nothing out there...

Scyth: Look closer...

As I looked closer, I saw a reflection of light...

Scyth: See it...?

I looked at Scyth and then peeked around the wreck... Then I noticed a barrel... The figure starts to take shape and after a while, I realized it was a human, perfectly camouflaged under a pile of rubble... I was startled for a bit, and then I heard a ricochet behind me as I moved my head behind the wreck just in time...

Blain: frackin' hell...!!

Scyth: If you were out there, you'd be dead already...

Blain: ... Yeah...

Scyth: There's one up the building as well...

Blain: I see him...

Scyth: Take my radio... It's adjusted to their frequency... Listen if their up to something... I'll lure them out.

Blain: ... You're frackin' insane...

Scyth: Aren't we all...?

I looked at him and he just grinned... He grabbed his weapon and moved on his hands and knees and I noticed the sniper looked away. We grabbed this opportunity to drag Jarod behind a wall as Rico took care of him... Then I noticed the radio...

Radio: I got a positive ID on Sigma-Alpha 301...

Scyth looked at me and I gestured him to run. Which he did. Holy shoot, this guy was fast... He didn't run as fast as Sonic could but... He sprint his legs out of @\$\$, jumping over obstacles and rolling over...

Radio: I lost him... I lost sight of him...

Radio: You see anyone else there?

Radio: That's a negative.

Not long after that, a shot was heard. We peeked over the walls, and the human on top of a building dropped dead of the ledge and fell all the way down... I heard how he hit the ground and it was rather unfortunate how he hit the ground, but the sound of someone hitting the ground and breaking a few bones sends chills down my spine. And then another shot was heard...

Scyth: Clear up!!

Blain: Clear down!!

Then I noticed Scyth got up. He was in view all this time except I couldn't see him... I looked at Jarod, but he looked alright. It looked worse than it actually was, he started smiling again. I walked up towards Scyth who was standing near that dead body that fell down the roof. He looked awful... I saw a bone sticking out of his leg while his ankles were dislocated. He had cuts all over his body from hitting the wall on the way down and his eyes were wide open as a stream of blood was going down his lips... Scyth looked at me, and than back at the human...

Scyth: See it...?

Blain: ... He's not a GUN soldier...?

Scyth: Nope...

Blain: ... Then what is he...?

Scyth flicked his ear-rings, closed his eyes and sighed...

Scyth: It's one of Zakhaev's men... He'd be pissed if he found out I killed one of his best men...

Blain: Zakhaev...?

Scyth: Yeah... The guy who's been chasing me for the last decades...

Blain: ... I see... Why are they after you...?

Scyth: Couple of reasons...

Blain: ... Go on...

Scyth: First of all, I'm a Lifeform... Created by Robotnik as well... They wanna exterminate every single one of them...

Blain: Why?

Scyth: No idea... But they think I'm the last one... Also, I was behind the hit on Robotnik...

Blain: ... It was you...?

Scyth: Yeah... I saw life shortly after the first war ended... I had no idea why I ever was created... Or why I was set loose... Robotnik survived the war... I don't know how... But he turned his back on me... He sent Zakhaev after me with the intention to take me out... I took on the roll of an assassin, and took Robotnik out instead... Also because it paid good...

Blain: So who you're working for...?

Scyth: For the highest bidder... And the strange thing is, I never had weapons training or anything like

that... Ever since the very first time I opened, my eyes, I was capable of handling almost every type of weapon there is...

Blain: How...?

Scyth: That's where you came in...

Blain: Whadda ya mean...?

Scyth: If I recall...

He felt my left arm...

Scyth: You visited Robotnik after you deflected...

Blain: I had no choice... I was dying...

Scyth: I'm not saying you're a traitor Blain... The thing is, Robotnik used something of you to create me, with the same knowledge you have... I don't know how he pulled it off, or why, but he did... After I took Robotnik out, I thought that Zakhaev would give up. But he didn't... Instead... The job got passed on to some guy called Paul Miller... Head of GUN... He took over from Robotnik...

Blain: The Junta...?

Scyth: Exactly... Miller had no enemies what so ever, and all of his actions had the green light. They're own government didn't have anything to say about it... Then the rumours started... Rumours of assassinating Miller and change it into a democratic government... Miller found out and executed everyone for high treason... Then he formed his own type of government... Except the humans didn't agree... There are lots of people who want Miller dead as well... And I'm one of 'em...

Blain: So what's happening now...?

Scyth: Miller struggles to stay on top while the GUN and ICA continue their ways... This could be all over very soon... Miller has no idea what he's doing while the pressure grows larger on him... He's gonna make a mistake someday, and when he does, I'll make sure he'll regret it...

Blain: Right... Something bothers me though...

Scyth: What...?

Blain: ... How'd you know all that...?

Scyth: ... What? The names and everything?

Blain: Yeah.

Scyth: Because I was there from the very beginning... I was there before it all started...

Blain: Right...

I took a glance at him. He looked at me for a moment...

Scyth: Look... These guys want me dead, Blain, and if they find out you're one of 'em, you'll get hunted down as well... I don't need your help... Then again, I can't do this on my own... We're in it together

and the only way to survive is to work together... I need you, and you need me...

Blain: ...

Scyth: Trust me... All my life I've been looking for lifeforms... For decades I've been disappointed to know that there are no more... Then I discovered you...

Blain: ... What if you're mistaken?

Scyth: I'm not... I know you are... But they don't know... All I'm asking is to be part of the MNAF... I'm tired of getting chased down like that, Blain...

Blain: ... Got a plan...?

Scyth: There's always a way...

Blain: ... Go on...

Scyth told me his plan. How to end the war. When I heard it, I thought he was crazy. But I guess all lifeforms are. He wanted to assassinate Miller, Zakhaev, and some other guy, who were responsible for everything. The thing is, he told me about a few humans who are on his side. But it'll have to wait... Scyth told me it was very risky, and once I was in, there is no way out. No one should be informed of the plan... For now, the MNAF is somewhat intact, and we're trying to push them back. It's war now. The plan that Scyth has is only meant as backup encase everything goes wrong... Things brighten up though... For the very first time in weeks, ever since this started, I had the feeling we were making a difference and finally could strike back at those frackers...

We continued our way back to the others. Jarod was fine in the end, except he kept on doging about his wound. I can't blame him really. But as soon as we were starting to relax, Scyth received a message on his radio that scared the living shoot out of us...

Radio: Something went wrong. We haven't heard from him in hours.

Radio: You think he's there?

Radio: Most likely. He reported that he has been seen with MNAF troops.

Radio: Alright... Dispatch the ICA. Be advised, I've spotted a battlewalker regiment of the MNAF a few kilometres up north... Handle with extreme caution.

Radio: Roger.

Scyth: They know where we are now...

We took immediate action. All the weapons we got were brought outside, and we placed a fifty calibre machine gun on top of a roof. A few scouts got send out to keep an eye on the surroundings as we placed mines... After an hour or so, we were done... All we could do was to wait for them...

Hours passed by without hearing from them... It turned night... Then one of the scouts reported he spotted infantry of around 50 men, escorted by 2 tanks and 4 battlewalkers. After hearing that, we wanted to abort the attack but Scyth came up with an ingenious plan. If we manage to take out the first tank and the last, their gonna be stuck in the street and that would give us the opportunity to perforate them all. The only problems are the battlewalkers... But we needed to make sure they would enter this particular street, or we're fracked... Scyth said not to worry about it...

I could hear them in the distance... Not long after that, I saw them. I was up high in a building, watching them... Two battlewalkers up front with a tank behind them, infantry in the middle, tank after that, and two battlewalkers behind them... Then all of a sudden, a loud explosion is heard, and I noticed as I looked down a massive EMP pulse spreading out down below. Everything that was electrical short-circuited that was in range of the pulse, and the troops get disoriented down below. After that, it was easy to take them out... The fifty calibre machine guns rattled from above as anti-tank missiles light up the night and massive explosion after explosion occurred... The enemy troops below had no idea what was happening and were still disoriented by the EMP pulse. One by one, they all got gunned down... It only lasted for fifteen minutes and these guys never had a chance. The gunfire died out as we all got out on the streets again... We were looking through the wrecks and inspecting the dead bodies for anything useful... What we found was a lot of weapons and ammo...

Scyth: That's one for the good guys...

Tavish: Hehehe...

Half an hour later, we moved out of Robotropolis. The plan was to move to an MNAF base located 124 kilometres from Robotropolis. Although we managed to have a small victory here didn't mean the morals of the guys were raised... Most of these guys were afraid of what might be ahead... Some were worried sick about their families and friends, and so was I...

We've been walking for almost a week without much sleep... On the way, we didn't encounter much trouble... The guys however, didn't say much on the way and only talked when someone asked them something...

In the distance, behind the hills, I could see our flag waving in the cold night sky. I remember when we first noticed the flag, everyone sighed in relieved and seeing that flag raised up their morals a bit. They started talking again and I couldn't resist cracking a smile. We made it. We finally made it. After days of walking, we finally made it...

One of the guys ran up the hills and looked in the distance... As we all slowly walked up the hill, our hopes got shattered to pieces once again... What we saw was a base in ruins... Burning tank wrecks, dead bodies scattered throughout the base... At that point, it was truly FUBAR...

Some became pissed and threw their gear on the ground, cursing and swearing... Others just sat down and sobbed... And there were guys who just stared into blank space... Like me and some other guys I didn't know... He looked all pale and was shaking a bit...

He grabbed his gear and looked at me... He said he was going to take a piss somewhere... I knew what he was gonna do... He wasn't gonna go for a piss... And not long after that, we heard a shot... I closed my eyes and sighed...

11 - Sunblock...

It's been a week since we've arrived in Remington. Mahabi, Lattei, Terry and me stayed in that town since we've arrived... Sometimes we made walks through the deserted town and looked for ways to stay busy... Sometimes it was really eerie that a town like this is deserted... But, like Mahabi said, we could steal things and get away with it. It's just so surreal... And every night, I kept on worrying about Cody and everyone else... I didn't know where they were... But as soon Terry, Lattei or Mahabi noticed I was worrying, they talked to me. And I did the same to everyone else. Terry said he misses his family a lot and I even caught him crying in a corner one night as the others were asleep. And Mahabi and Lattei didn't really show it, but they lost friends as well. And that's how we looked after each other... It's still kinda weird though, being surrounded by three guys and I'm the only female... Also, I was the oldest of the bunch, but I guess that's what made our group so tight. Because the four of us had all different backgrounds and stuff...

During the week we were in that little town, nothing happened. No enemy soldiers, no civilians, nothing... And one night, Terry and I went out because we got bored stiff sitting in the house all day... But something was bothering me though...

Nicole: Terry...?

Terry: Hm?

Nicole: You think we're gonna stay here for much longer...?

Terry: I don't know... Why you ask?

Nicole: Well... Ever gave a thought that... If GUN moves through this town that we're gonna be in a lot of trouble...?

Terry: Their not coming back Nicole. There's nothing here for them...

Nicole: Yeah I know but... Still... It's not like we can stay here forever...

Terry: Yeah...

Nicole: It's just that I'm worried sick you know...?

Terry: I know, dude... Look at the bright though...

Nicole: What bright side...? I didn't know there was one...

Terry: We got a whole city for our own... We can do what we want here... We got food, shelter, warm beds, hot showers... Couldn't get any better for us right now, while there are thousands of people out there who would kill for the things we have right now. Better take advantage of it while we still can.

Nicole: True...

Terry: But... You're right... We gotta keep moving at some point.

Nicole: Yeah... Even if it gets us killed...?

Terry: ... Even if it gets us killed...

Not long after that, we went home... We found Mahabi and Lattei in an intense game of Chess...

Nicole: Hey guys...

Lattei: Back so soon?

Mahabi: Checkmate.

Lattei: Whadda ya mean checkmate?

Mahabi: You're king has nowhere to go.

Lattei: ...

Then Lattei used his king to capture Mahabi's queen. The expression on Mahabi's face was priceless after he realized he made a wrong move... Lattei taps his forehead with his index finger and grinned.

Lattei: Common sense, my dearest cousin... Its all about the mind games... Let you're enemies believe what you want them to believe... Then strike at their weakest point...

Mahabi made his next move...

Lattei: Let the pawns do all the dirty work... Eliminate the most important pieces... Take out the pawns to avoid them from getting back up... Drive those who were responsible in a corner... Get you're hands on what they want the most...

Lattei moves his queen so that the king of Mahabi had nowhere to go. He picks up the king, held it in his hand and looked at it for a moment... Then he crushes it in the palm of his hand and looked at the shattered pieces for a while...

Lattei: Then it's checkmate...

Lattei wasn't talking about the game of chess... He was talking about this whole deal, this so called war that is being waged outside. You could see his eyes were burning with vengeance and that he had a score to settle with someone... I didn't know who though... All this time he was relaxed and mellow, and didn't really talk much, but I guess he was tired of waiting... I guess it was time for us to take matters in our own hands... He wasn't afraid to die for his ideals... And that's when I realized we had nothing to loose if we wanted to make a difference... Lattei was the first one to realize it... That we rather wanted to die on our feet then to live on our knees...

That same night, we were preparing to leave. We all checked the houses and stores and every other building before we left to see if there was anything useful. The gun Terry gave to Mahabi a week earlier was never given back. I didn't think Terry wanted it back, because he found a new one when we were in that store... At some point, we came across a shop... We never noticed this shop before... It has two doors... One door that was locking out the other, so it was impossible to get in without opening the first door. Also, the windows were barricaded... We didn't know what kind of shop it was, but the letters were faded and it was unclear of what it said...

Terry: Whoa, I haven't seen this one before.

Mahabi: Let's check it out.

Terry: It's locked.

Mahabi: Pssh, move aside. ... Amateur.

Terry: ...

Mahabi: ... Pin, I need a pin.

Nicole: ... I don't have pins...

Mahabi: Paperclip then.

Nicole: *shakes no*

Mahabi: ... Note to self, paperclips are essential for survival...

Then Mahabi went to the house next to the shop and kicked in the door. Terry followed him and about fifteen minutes later, they came back with a bunch of paperclips...

Mahabi: ... Alright, let's try...

He bends the paperclip and forced the lock... At some point we heard a click.

Mahabi: These locks are easy to crack, they're so old they're gonna-

He looked at the paperclip that was all bent...

Mahabi: frackin... Let's try again...

He takes out another paperclip and forces the lock again... But no click this time...

Mahabi: shoot... Hold on...

All:

Lattei: Stand back.

We looked behind us and noticed Lattei was holding a huge brick. He tosses it up and down then threw with all his strength against the window. The window cracked, but didn't break... So everyone got a brick and threw it against the window and at some point, it shatters. And then an alarm went off... But we still didn't manage to get in because of the steel bars...

Terry: frackin' hell, whatever they were selling here, must have been pretty expensive...

Nicole: It's not like they were selling groceries or anything...

Terry: It better be worth it... Now how do we get in?

Lattei and Mahabi inspected the steel bars. They looked up and noticed something...

Mahabi: These bars are being held up by hinges. It rolls up. We can dislocate it by forcing it up. Terry, push the bars up.

Terry took off his jacket and sunglasses and forced the bars up... It looked pretty heavy, but Terry managed to lift it up a bit. Mahabi and Lattei took a brick and slammed it against the hinges. At some point, we heard a "clang" and it falls down, along with all the necessary havoc. All sorts of shatters were heard...

Terry: Whoa! That didn't sound good!

Then we entered the shop through the window... It was dark... I didn't see where I was going... At some point, I tripped over something and heard a lot of stuff shatter... Kinda embarrassed by this, I quickly crawled up and smiled nervously around as the alarm was still going off... Mahabi got so sick of it he kept on kicking the alarm box...

Mahabi: Shut up! Shut up!! Shut up!!!

Terry: ... frackin hell...

Lattei: What?

Terry: This is a fracking antique shop!!

Then Terry kicked over a table where a lot of vases were standing... And it shatters all again...

Lattei: I think you're jumping the gun a bit Terry... Look...

Lattei pointed all the way down the aisle and we noticed a huge display... It had all sorts of weapons... Knives, swords, wooden pistols, crossbows, archery equipment, ancient weapons... As soon as Mahabi turned the lights on, we saw a lot of other stuff... Red flags, with a white circle in the middle with some cross in it. I believe it's called a swastika. All sorts of posters in an ancient language with that symbol on it, and some guy with a funny moustache that kept on looking as if he had to shoot needles... Statues of persons, paintings, ancient pottery, and all sorts of stuff were on display behind thick windows...

Nicole: ...Whoa...

Terry: What?

Nicole: Everything here is at least a thousand years old...

Terry: ... You don't say...

Nicole: ... Twenty five thousand dinar for a flag with some head of a human with the funny moustache...?

Terry: ... I'd be paying twenty five thousand dinar not to see it! frackin' hell...

Terry and Mahabi walked off to look around as Lattei stood in front of the display and stared at all the knives on display. All of a sudden, he started punching the window 'till his knuckles were bleeding. He didn't stop there though. He kept on going until the glass shatters... He looked at all the knives and then to the swords...

Lattei: Sabre... Katana... Broadsword... Rapier... Machete... Bayonet... Jian... Tachi... Cutlass...

He carefully picks on of the swords, takes it out the sheath and stared it for a while. Terry and Mahabi wandered off to look for other useful stuff. I looked at Lattei...

Lattei: Just like my old one...

Nicole: What...?

Lattei: *sighs* Never mind... I'm just rambling...

Nicole: What is it?

Lattei: ... This is a fine cutlass sword... I was taught how to handle a cutlass sword, because firearms are not noble... There is no honour in taking a life with a firearm... We only pillaged people and villages that deserved it... We were bound by a code, and the code is law...

Nicole: What are you talking about...?

Lattei: Pirates aren't just legends you've heard of as a kid... Their real...

Nicole: Huh...?

Lattei: *nods and smiles* I want answers just as much as you do Nicole...

He balances the sword by the blade and inspected it. The sword was in pretty good shape though. It was all polished up and looked authentic enough... He ties the sheath to his belt and sticks the sword in it. Then he gets out another sword from the display and inspected that as well. The sheath gets tied at the other end of his belt and he was now armed with two swords. He tightens his bandana and there was a determined look on his face... He gets out the swords and made some impressive moves and placed both swords in the sheaths again. At that point, Terry and Mahabi got back and noticed Lattei standing there...

Terry: Playing pirate Lattei?

Lattei: ... Aye...

Terry: Whoa, nice impression. I almost thought you're a real one.

Lattei: Hehehe...

Mahabi: Hey Terry, how much you think this priceless ancient vase is worth?

Terry: ... Priceless?

Mahabi: Whaha! Yo Lattei!! Heads up!!

Then Mahabi throws the vase towards Lattei... Lattei quickly grabbed a sword and sliced it into pieces... It happened so fast I barely knew what was going on...

Mahabi: You still got it...

Lattei: Aye...

Not long after that, we grabbed our stuff and left the city. At first, we were somewhat cheerful, but as the hours passed by, we moved slower. We were starting to get tired. The road was long and we followed signs as Terry checked the map every once in a while. On the way, we didn't encounter a living soul and it was very quiet... And that's what scared me the most. I rather be hearing people yell and see explosions and hear gunfire than to experience total silence. Then at least you know that people are still alive, but ever since I left, we've been only hearing total silence, like we were the last ones on the planet... Really scary...

Terry: Alright, so this guy walks into a bar right? He gets through the door, does a somersault and lands on a bar seat. The bartender, all baffled by what he just saw, asked him: "How did you do that?!" The guy said: "I'm a circus performer!" Then another guy comes in, makes a somersault and a double corkscrew and lands on a bar seat. The bartender, all baffled again said: "How the hell did you managed to do that?!!" "Easy!" the guy said. "I'm a gymnastic!" Then another guy comes in, does a somersault, a double corkscrew and another somersault and lands a bar seat next the others. "What the- How did you-" The bartender stutters. The guy said: "Yeah I'm sorry, I slipped over the door mat". Whaha!!

Mahabi: *laughs*

Lattei/Nicole: ...

Terry: What, it's funny!

Mahabi: I know one.

Terry: Do share Mahabi, because these two don't know what's funny.

Mahabi: How do you keep an echidna busy for 24 hours?

All: ...

Mahabi: Place him a round room and tell him there's free food in the corners.

Terry: *laughs*

Nicole: ... How long do we have to keep hearing this...

Lattei: ... No idea... Not long I hope...

Terry: I got another one!

Mahabi: Spit it out.

Terry: A hedgehog, echidna and a horse stand near a swimming pool. The hedgehog says: "If I let my wiener down in the water, I can tell the water's temperature!"

Nicole: Ew!! Terry!!

Terry: Lemme finish!

Nicole: ... *sighs*

Terry: Ok, so the others are like, "go ahead". The hedgehog lets his wiener down in the water and then says: "24 degrees Celsius!" The others are pretty impressed. Then the echidna says: "If I let my wiener down in the water, I can tell how many gallons of water there is in the pool". So he did. "10 gallons of water!!" He yelled. Then the horse said: "If I let my wiener down in the water, I can tell how deep the pool is". So the horse lets his wiener down in the water. After he thought for a while, he looked at the others and said: "The pool is 2,4 metres deep!" *laughs*

Mahabi/Lattei: *laughs*

Nicole: ... *sighs*

I thought that was seeing something in the distance. As I looked closer, I noticed there was a fire up ahead. The guys were still laughing and telling jokes, but as we got closer to it, they stopped laughing... What we saw were all sorts of wrecks, and a lot of dead human bodies incinerated to the point that they were all black. You could barely see they were humans, and the smell was unbearable as we passed by...

Terry: ... Well, I guess they forgot to bring sunblock... That's what you get for staying out in the sun for too long...

Lattei: What happened here...?

Terry: I don't know, a bomb maybe...?

Mahabi: Le-Let's just keep moving...

I was starting to feel nauseous... The images of the bodies and the smell became too much for me. I told the others that I had to get away from it, and apparently, they thought it was a good idea... We got over a small hill, but all we found there was the same scenario on the other side... I had to sit down; I was starting to get really dizzy, so I sat down as the others waited for me. They were all eagerly to move on, but I really had to sit for moment. I took a deep breathe. Then all of a sudden, I vomited. The guys didn't really seem surprised that I vomited... There were more gruesome things to see then a puddle of vomit... Not long after that, Terry helped me getting up and got out a bottle of water and gave it to me. Then he stared at the puddle of vomit...

Terry: Heh... When was the last time you ate chicken wings... You ok...?

Nicole: Y-yeah...

Terry: Alright... Let's go...

The days I've been spending with Mahabi, Lattei and Terry were somewhat fun, as far as you can call it that. There are thousands of people out there, who are not that fortunate as we were. And although the lame jokes and the sounds of the guys laughing cheered me up a bit, I could never escape the harsh reality that is war... Because in the end, you'll always have to realize and face the truth... And the truth was that there's still a war being waged outside...

12 - Caldish, Caldish...

For hours we've been trying to set up communication devices. We've made patrols in the forests near the base to look for survivors. No one. No one was left alive. No one responded to our radio calls. Every MNAF division we know did not respond to our calls. Then there was an unexpected radio message that kept on looping at a certain emergency broadcast frequency. It was a guy, telling that 6 nuclear warheads impacted on different coastlines, wiping out most of the MNAF troops. It's over. We lost... And at some point, we gave up. Regan and I sat around a table to discuss what the plan was next, but to no avail. We didn't know what was next. We didn't know what to do anymore... Regan and I went outside to the others, who didn't say anything to each other. It was all quiet as we got out... As soon as they saw us, they gathered around...

Regan: It's eh... It's been a long journey. We lost a lot of good guys on the way and it's been tough... Yet you guys managed to fight on... But... We lost the war... It's all over... It's time to stop fighting for what we believe in... Now it's time to fight for our survival...

Blain: So sergeant Regan and I decided that... If you wanna go, you're free to go... You're no longer bound to the MNAF army and leaving it is not considered to be deserting... Find you're loved ones, and spend as much time as you can with them... I wish you all the best... I hope this situation is solved soon, so that you can grow old in peace... You guys deserved it more then anyone else... It's been an honour serving with you guys... Good luck...

Regan: Dismissed...

Some of the guys were baffled. Others walked off in different directions... Regan and I went inside a building again and sat on a chair. I leaned over with my face in the palm of my hands... Then there was a knock... As I looked up, I noticed Rico, Shifty, Tavish, Jarod and Scyth standing in the doorway...

Tavish: Sarge...?

Blain: Yeah?

Tavish: What are we gonna do now...? And what about the civilians...?

Blain: *sighs* I have no idea Tavish... I wish I knew...

Shifty: So what are you going to do...?

Blain: I got nothing... My home, my friends, gone. All gone... The only thing that I can do is to take lives as much as I can. I wanna oppose against the humans... The war might be lost, but that doesn't mean I give up... I will continue my campaign against the humans... I want retribution and I'm willing to die to accomplish it...

Scyth: ... Then you're not alone... I'm with you.

Regan: *nods*

Shifty: Hell, we got this far already. Let's die with dignity.

Tavish: ... Yeah... Count me in...

Rico: Same here...

Jarod: Hoo-ah...?

All: Hoo-ah...

Scyth: There's a... A nuclear underground shelter in Azerbaijan... The place is so big, it easily fits a lot of troops and supplies... The surface of the base is around one thousand square metres with lots of halls. Private quarters with beds, bathrooms and all that. Heavily fortified from the outside... It's not a 5-star hotel, but it's a whole lot better than staying here...

Blain: ... How far is it?

Regan: Not that far. Seventy miles north east of here.

Scyth: The base will be most likely populated. But it shouldn't be a problem to reach it.

Jarod: I've seen a 4x4 outside.

Scyth: Wouldn't that attract attention?

Jarod: Maybe, but it sure is a hell of a lot better than walking. Besides, it has a fifty cal mounted on the roof. Should fit.

Blain: Worth the shot...

Tavish: Alright... Let's go then...

So we went outside. Like Jarod said, there was a 4x4 outside near the compound. Jarod inspected the vehicle. Well, truth be told, I don't know shoot about things like this. Jarod checked the tires, oil, fuel and all that and half an hour later, we were good to go...

No one talked during the long ride. Jarod drove not that fast and all those little bumps and humps on the terrain and roads were rather relaxing. Shifty was on the fifty calibre encase we came across enemy activities. But the others... Everyone was so tired of the events that happened over the weeks. I placed one foot on the dashboard and leaned my head on my hand, and supported my arm against the door. Regan, Scyth and Tavish fell asleep in the back. And behind them, the lioness and that female hedgehog fell asleep as well. They never said anything to us for some reason, and I guess they just didn't want to meddle. I can understand. In times like these, you wish someone knows the exact right answers and take the best decisions for you. You trust your life in the hands of others as they make the decisions for you. But the question remains... Would it be the right decision in the end...?

I just looked outside the window and saw the sun coming up. It sheds its light on the open grass plains we were driving on. As I stared at the scenario and the forests in the distance, my mind wandered off. I was still thinking about everyone else and if they ever made it... But I thought of Nicole the most... Memories of her went by so fast, and every once in a while I had a little smile

on my face. Every now and then, I felt my eyelids getting heavy. I closed them for a short moment every time and opened them, but it didn't take long before they went down again... At some point, I gave in and closed my eyes... I thought about Nicole a lot and felt how I drifted away...

I woke up all of a sudden by machine gun fire. I was so startled by that, I looked around and found out that Shifty was firing the fifty calibre machine gun... And of course, the others woke up as well from the sudden chaos...

Shifty: Go!! Go!! Go!! Floor it!!

Jarod: Get you're @\$ down from the turret Shifty!!

Shifty: Just keep you're eyes on the damn road, will ya?!!

Blain: What the hell is going on?!!

Jarod: We got two enemy vehicles on our tail!! Shifty!!! Get you're skinny @\$ down the turret!!

Shifty: Come on and get some!! Bring it!!

Jarod: Don't be a frackin' hero here dude!!

Blain: Left!! Left!!!

Jarod: Yeah I see it sarge!! I'm not a complete fracktard!!

Tavish: Ha!! Got a bit of a low self-esteem Jarod?!!

Jarod: Hey frack you, Tavish!! You wanna make sarcastic comments?!! You're free to be sarcastic when we're safe!!

Shifty: Got it!!

Tavish: What?!!

Shifty: First car flipped his wheels!! Ha!! How's that for a wipeout!!

Jarod: Good!! Now take out the other one you fracking shootbag!!

Shifty: Whoooooooooooo!! One just fell down and got hit by his own car!! Ha!!

We heard a few ricochets off the vehicles hull. I noticed some holes in the roof, but no one got hit. That was just real lucky... All I could do was to hold on to something as Jarod was speeding through the landscape with high speed and Shifty kept on firing the machinegun...

Shifty: Ha!! Missed me, you stupid frack!!

Jarod: Hold on!!

We got over a hill with high speed and flew through the air. We landed hard as the vehicle started to sway. Jarod managed to correct it but I was scared shootless for a moment...

Shifty: Whoohooohoo!! Yeah!!! Encore you frackin' shootbag!! Encore!!

Jarod: Shifty, I fracking swear on my mothers grave, if you don't get you're @\$\$ out of that turret, I'm gonna shove the fifty cal up you're fracking @\$\$!!

Shifty: Will do, sweetie!! Haha!!

Tavish: Shoving things up his @\$\$ isn't new for Shifty!! It won't work Jarod!!

Shifty: Hey frack you Tavish!! The only reason why you became a corporal is because you went under a desk a lot!! Hell, even bend over if commanded!!

Tavish: Ha!! It worked didn't it?!!

Shifty: fracking fufag!! *laughs*

Then all of a sudden, a loud explosion was heard... As I stuck my head outside the window, I noticed the vehicle that was following us got blown up...

Jarod: Whoo!! Way to go Shifty!!

Shifty: ... Eh... I don't think it was me...

Jarod: What?!! I can't hear you!!

Shifty: I don't think it was me!!

Blain: Then where did it come from?!!

Jarod: Does it matter?!!

Shifty: frack yeah, it matters!! Incoming!!!

Jarod: What?!!

Shifty: Gunship on our tail!! Floor it!!

Scyth: Those frackers blew up their own guys?!!

Tavish: That's what you get if you can't aim, huh Shifty?!!

Shifty: WHOA!!!

Blain: What?!! What?!!!

Shifty: Almost got my head blown off sarge, so yeah, my panties are in a bunch!!

Jarod: Will you get the frack down from there?!!

Shifty: Incoming!!!

The loud noise the engine of the gunship produced was ear deafening as it flies just above us. I could feel the heat of the exhausts of the gunship. It flew in front of us way faster than we drove, and a few hundred metres ahead of us, it made a one eighty turn. Almost immediately, it fired his board side cannons straight at us. Jarod reacted instantly by turning the wheel to the left, but we hit another slope, making us airborne and made a huge jump. As soon as we landed, we heard a loud "bang" and the vehicle moved to the right... Because of the high speed, the car flipped over a couple of times... It happened so fast I could hardly grab anything... Then it just turned black...

For some reason, I ended up in the backseat when I opened my eyes. I was disoriented by the

crash and took me a while to realize where I was. My head hurt a lot and I noticed that everyone was passed out and had a lot of cuts and bruises... I felt like shoot... My whole body seemed to be numb as I tried to look around. It was all blurry... But a few minutes later, I noticed the vehicle was on his right side. As I slowly regained consciousness, the feeling in my body came back... Then I felt that my left leg was hurting a lot... As I looked down, I noticed it was dislocated. Really nasty to see. Especially if it's your own leg. I tried to look away from my leg, but it wasn't that easy. For some reason, I had to stare at it, as if it was healing itself. It couldn't be much of a shootier time. Not with the gunship on our tail... But I didn't hear it... Could it...? In the distance, I saw the gunship wreck, going up in flames. I was so baffled by that... How the hell did that happen...? No matter how hard I tried to listen and look around of how it happened, I didn't hear and see anything... At first, I thought that I turned deaf for one reason or another, but I realized I wasn't deaf after I heard the radio...

Radio: *static noise* Caldish, caldish, this is Alex-Five zero niner, do you copy? *static noise*

Radio: Caldish, caldish, this is Alex-Five zero niner, do you copy?? *static noise*

Caldish... I've heard that term before... Except I can't remember it... The harder I try to remember it, the blanker my thoughts became. After a moment, I realized what "Caldish" meant. Caldish is a term, used to identify unknown friendlies. For example, you see a friendly vehicle, but can not determine if the driver and the gunners are friendly or hostile. In order to communicate, they use the codeword "Caldish"... If they not respond with the reply "Omaha Juno" the vehicle is considered to be hostile... That term is only known with the MNAF, so whoever was calling out to us, it's MNAF...

I grabbed the radio as quickly as I could, which was very slow in my present state...

Blain: Caldish, caldish... A-Alex-F-five zero niner... Omaha J-Juno... Repeat, O-Omaha Juno...

Radio: *static noise* Good afternoon Omaha Juno. Alex-Five zero niner at you're service. What can I do for you guys?

Blain: Reqe-Requesting immediate med evac. D-Do you have a visual on the crash site?

Radio: That's a 10-4, Omaha Juno. Notifying EMT's. ETA 10 minutes. Hang in there; we'll get you out.

Blain: T-thanks Alex-Five zero niner... O-Omaha Juno out...

Then it felt like I was drained... Like every move required a lot of strength and every move I made wore me out... Then I just dropped the radio... It fell on Tavish' head, and I'm sure that'll leave a mark, but I'll apologize to him after I regained conscious... Then all of a sudden, it was lights out...

I passed out again...

Maybe it was... I don't know, 15? Maybe 20 minutes? I woke up from stomping sounds. I opened my eyes and noticed I was lying outside, away from the wreck... As I looked around, I saw an APC there with the MNAF logo on it and a few guys walking busy with all sorts of stuff... And my leg didn't hurt anymore... As I looked down, I saw it was popped back in its socket...

???: They took care of it when you passed out. It's a lot more painful when you're awake...

As I looked up, I saw a leopard kneeling next to me... He had the same uniform as me, except he got the logo of the battlewalker regiment on his sleeves and chest.

Blain: Thanks...

???: Don't mention it. Corporal Vijay, 601st battlewalker regiment.

Blain: Sergeant Blain, 506th...

Vijay: 506th...?

Blain: *nods*

Vijay: How the hell did you managed to survive the titan crash, sir? I heard it was a massacre.

Blain: It was... The only reason why we survived is because we were at the back...

Rico: Good to see you're still in one piece sir...

Blain: Good to see you too... Where are the others...?

Rico: Tavish... He's sitting in the APC treated for a few cuts he has... Jarod and Scyth went to look for Shifty...

Blain: Shifty...?

Rico: ... Shifty was still outside in the turret when we crashed... He must have been thrown out of it...

Blain: Oh shoot...

Tavish: ... I don't know if he made it...

Then not long after that, a few guys ran through, carrying a stretcher with the battered body of Shifty... As they were running by, I saw Shifty was bleeding a lot... Jarod ran towards them...

Jarod: Desoto!! How's he doing?!! Desoto!!!

Desoto: Will you get the hell out of here?!!

Jarod: Don't touch me, Genaro!! Don't fracking touch me!!

Genaro: Hey cool it!! Get yourself checked out in the APC, you look like shoot.

Jarod: frack you...

Desoto: Alright, load this one up in the APC!!

Jarod: Shifty!! Shifty, look at me!! Hang in there, you fracking shootbag!! Don't you fracking die!!

The stretcher with Shifty's body got loaded up in the APC, and we were told to get in as well. And then we drove off... We were going to Azerbaijan, which was only a few miles away... We almost made it... But if these guys weren't there, we wouldn't have made it at all. Looking through the small porthole of the APC were two massive legs visible, as I heard the stomping of the battlewalkers... Two in total... I still didn't know who Alex-Five zero niner was, but I reckon it's either Vijay or that other guy. We were really lucky... Maybe someone was protecting us from above... Watching us, like a shadow...

As I was sitting in the APC, I noticed my leg was painful again. The deep wound I had in my leg was the same as the dislocated one. The wound never really healed, but it was open again, and bleeding...

Then we reached Azerbaijan... Like with many cities, it got shot to pieces... But we didn't drove through the city... I saw a glimpse of it. As we were passing by the city, I saw the landscape... Devastated... I saw a group of humans being executed to the side of the road. They were shot in the head, just like that. And for some reason, I had a grin on my face as I was witnessing that...

You didn't see anything. The base was underground. The only thing you could see, were two massive gates, and we drove through. Once we got through, large hydraulic doors opened up from the ground, so you could see a massive downhill slope. The convoy followed that path, and as I looked through the rear porthole, the gates and the doors closed. We were driving through a massive tunnel with every once in a while a light. At some point, we got into this gigantic underground basement, where... Only a tank and another APC were parked...

Then we got out. Rico, Jarod, Tavish, Regan, Scyth and me followed the medics. It wasn't easy to keep up. These guys ran to the sick bay to take care of Shifty... Poor Jarod... Everyone knew Jarod and Shifty were close buddies ever since first grade. Good friends, supporting each other trough thick and thin. Like pepper and salt... Must have been hard for Jarod to see Shifty like this... So we left the room so that Jarod could have a minute with him...

Jarod: What the hell are you doing to me, Shifty... *sighs* I told you to get out of the turret, you fracking shootbag... What the hell am I gonna do without you, dude...? I... *sighs*

Shifty: ... F-fracking hell, don't you ever shut up...

Jarod: S-Shifty?!!

Shifty: You're so full of shoot, you know that...?

Jarod: C'mere dude!!

Shifty: Ow!! frackin' hell!! Easy on me!!

Jarod: Dude!!

Shifty: That's the last time you'll drive Jarod... Next time, I will...

Jarod: You?!! You can't even see the difference between the clutch and the horn.

Shifty: Hehehe...

Tavish: Here, have a coffee. Those nice blokes offered us a coffee.

Rico: You know the sarge doesn't drink coffee...

Tavish: Hell, I'm not dieing before I see the sarge drinking a cup.

Blain: Hehehe... You guys alright?

Tavish/Rico: Yes sir...

Regan: ... So, we made it to Azerbaijan... Now what...?

Scyth: Only time will tell... You'll see...

For the rest of the day, we had medical treatment. My leg was patched up, and walking still hurt a lot, but I'll manage. We're safe for now...

13 - The voice of reason...

Passing by another destroyed town... And then there was that little village where lots of people were shot... Dead bodies everywhere again... It doesn't surprise me anymore. It's all natural, like its all part of the scenery. It's like "Hey! A nice flower! Oh look, and there's a bee! Bunnies! Hey look! A decapitated human!" Meh... I can honestly say that I think it was sad to see, except it doesn't bring me anywhere whenever I was thinking about it. Things like that were happening. That's it. No "and's, if's or but's" about it...

We spend the night in a house that was one the few houses that were still intact. But there wasn't much left... A few tables, a couch that was on its side as well as a few comfortable chairs and upstairs just one mattress and a few other stuff... Mahabi dragged the mattress downstairs and fell asleep on it the moment he flopped down while Lattei just kicked back in one of the comfortable chairs. Terry made a fire in the small fireplace... Walking outside and spending a day sleeping outside wore me out, and a little fire was really comforting... Once the fire was burning, Terry flopped down on the couch as I sat in another chair... I just stared at the flames and felt it was rather hypnotizing... We didn't say anything for at least half an hour and I noticed that Lattei already fell asleep. Terry had his eyes closed, but for some reason, I didn't feel tired... I was thinking about something...

Nicole: Terry...?

Terry: ... Hm...?

Nicole: ... What if we never make it to Azerbaijan...?

Terry: I don't know, Nic... The only way to find out is to keep going...

Nicole: Yeah but... What if we lose someone on the way...? I mean, we've been travelling together for over a month now, and... Although I only know you guys for a month, it feels like I know you for years... And... I wouldn't know what to do if I lose one of you guys...

Terry: Yeah... In situations like these, everyone acts different... Before everything started, people wouldn't even say hello to you when you pass by, and now their very happy to see you and beg you to tag along... Everyone desperately tries to find a little spark of hope when their in a hopeless situation and the only thing that can happen to us now is to die. Everyone dies in the end, Nicole... But now we have a choice on how to die. To die with dignity...? Or succumb to the will of you're oppressors and die on you're knees...?

Nicole: ... Yeah...

Terry: *sighs*

Nicole: ... I accepted the fact that... That I won't grow old in this world. That I won't die in a warm bed when I'm old next to the person I loved the most. I often talked about the future with Blain when I was young, and we both pictured ourselves with kids and grow old together. But none of that was realized... I had a daughter but... She got taken away from me without ever knowing why...

Terry: *nods* I know... I lost someone myself as well... And... Never knew the answer...

Nicole: ... Oh... Can I ask what happened...?

Terry: She died... Seven years ago, from a terminal illness...

Nicole: ... I'm sorry...

Terry: Heh...

It stayed silent for a while...

Nicole: ... How was she like...?

Terry: ... Hm..?

Nicole: What was her name...?

Terry: ... Sarudja...

Nicole: Beautiful name...

Terry: Hmm-mm... Her name reflected her personality... Beautiful... She was a leopard... And my mom...

Heh, well... She didn't really agree on our relationship... She could be a bit of a racist towards her though... Making all sorts of comments that really hurt her...

Nicole: Why, if I may ask...?

Terry: Well... Sarudja was a feline... And I'm a canine... That was a bit of a taboo... My mom loved me, but she didn't liked Sarudja for some reason... And no matter how many times she told me she was no good, I didn't listen to her. Sarudja never listened to her folks either... It was like a forbidden love or something while we didn't know what we were doing wrong... But... I can't say it was a mistake of us... We didn't do anything wrong... And I'm glad I've been with her for so many years... Would've been better if my mom didn't blame me... I still love my mom, but... For some reason, I'm blaming her...

Nicole: I see...

Terry: Yeah... *sighs*

Then it got me thinking again...

Nicole: You know Terry...

Terry: Hm...?

Nicole: When I was young... I met a girl in high school... Jayla was her name... We became friends real quick, but... Right from the beginning, I knew this wasn't an ordinary friendship...

Terry: ... You fell in love with her...?

I don't know why I brought this up. It's something I never said to anyone... Not even to Blain...

Nicole: ... *nods* It's eh... It wasn't for at least a few months before I kissed her... And... I don't know what's gotten into me... I mean, I always got told that stuff like that was a wrong thing to do, and only a guy and a girl are supposed to do that but... I didn't care about that... She made me feel things I never felt before with only a simple gesture... And it was something no one could do except for her...

Terry: I see...

Nicole: And... We both swore we kept it a secret...

Terry: Then what happened...?

Nicole: ...It... It went great for a year... And as time passed by, it wasn't just arsing around with little kisses and cuddles... It became deep... We... We truly loved each other while other people of our age were still arsing around... And... And at some point, we even went further than that... Like... All the way...

Terry: ... As in... "All the way" all the way...?

Nicole: *nods*

Terry: Oh whoa...

Nicole: And well... The nights I spend with her made me realize I wanted to be with her forever...

Terry: ... Ah...

Nicole: *sighs* ... Then one night, we got busted while I stayed over at her house... Her parents didn't want me to come over anymore and... They kicked Jayla out of the house... She wasn't their daughter anymore... Jayla stayed over with so called "friends" that dragged her down even more... And one night, I was with her... But I didn't know her "friend" was there was well... She used a syringe to inject stuff in her arm and sniffed all sorts of powder to make her feel better... And whenever she was under the influence of it, she was fracked by her "friend"... And that was all happening in front of my eyes... I couldn't stand it how her beautiful personality turned into something like this and I couldn't witness how her beautiful body was desecrated like that... So I got her out... I told my parents that she had trouble at home and if she could stay for a couple of weeks... Jayla and I talked for hours in bed and I saw her crying a lot... The only thing I could do was to hold her and cuddle, whispering things in her ear... I told her so many times I loved her very much, and assured it with kisses and things beyond that... But not long after that, we got busted again...

Terry: ... Oh...

I felt like I was gonna burst out in tears again... I took a very deep breath, and continued talking with shaky lips...

Nicole: Jayla... She got kicked out once again... But I wasn't... I talked for hours to my parents, trying to get them to understand, but I didn't convince them... I noticed they were starting to act different towards me, and the longer I stayed, the worse it became... Like I was being ignored or something... That hurt me so much... My mom always told me that love is the most beautiful thing there is, and yet she didn't see it... I didn't know what I did wrong... And that's one of the reasons I ran away from home...

Terry: *sighs*

Nicole: So... You shouldn't be blaming your mom, Terry... People make mistakes... And... Sometimes they don't realize they make mistakes... But we both know that we weren't the ones that made mistakes in the end... As long as you keep that in mind, you'll be fine, hun... Trust me...

Terry: Thanks Nicole...

Nicole: Anytime...

Then it stayed silent for a while as I stared at the flames...

Terry: ... Did you just call me hun...?

Nicole: ... Yeah...?

Terry: ... Maybe I find that offensive... Ever gave a thought about that...?

Nicole: Should I...?

Terry: ... No... No you don't have to...

Nicole: Hehe...

Terry: ... *yawns*

Nicole: ... What time is it...?

Terry: Three forty one AM...

Nicole: Are you tired...?

Terry: A little... You...?

Nicole: Same...

Terry: You know a good joke...?

Nicole: ... No...

Terry: Hehe...

Nicole: *smiles*

Terry: ... *sighs*

Nicole: Hm...?

Terry: ... I just miss Sarudja a lot you know...

Nicole: Like I miss Blain...

Terry: ... Yeah... Like you miss Blain...

It stayed silent for a very long time. All I did was to stare at the flames in the fireplace that was slowly dying out... And not long after that, I fell asleep...

I woke up from a sound... As soon as I opened my eyes, it was pitch black... The fire died out... I must have dozed off or something... I heard the soft breathing and snoring of the others, but all of a sudden, it stopped... It sounded like... Someone was choking, and it stopped abrupt... I whispered out the names, but there was no reply... As soon as my eyes were used to the darkness, I saw no one... I felt how my heart was beating, and I heard it was getting louder by the minute and that's where I became truly afraid... Carefully, I guided myself with my hands to get up... It was still pretty dark to see... So I slowly walked around to look for them... As soon I got to the staircase, I noticed a mirror... I had the feeling I was being watched... I quickly turned around, but there was nothing there... I must be getting crazy or something... As I turned around to walk up the stairs, I noticed a figure standing on top of it, and I got so petrified, I almost fell down. The figure walked down the stairs as it dissolved into thin air... I felt how a bone chilling breeze waved over me, and every little hair I had were raised up... Then all sorts of scary sounds slowly faded in... It sounded like whispers and a baby crying... I wanted to get out... I wanted to run away... But as I stared back in the mirror, I noticed Blain... For a second there, I thought he was behind me... So I turned around, but there was nothing there... But he didn't disappeared when I stared back in the mirror... He was smiling at me... Then all of a sudden, he stuck out his hand and grabbed my neck... As I looked down, I noticed his arm had a lot of deep cuts and dried blood stains on his fur, and his head came out of the mirror... A huge gaping hole was seen on his forehead as blood was flowing out of it... He kept on saying that it was my fault as he slowly squeezed my neck... His soft, tender glare became ice cold, and his glare penetrated right in my eyes...

Nicole: *gasp!!*

Mahabi: Geez, finally, I've been trying to wake up for at least an hour now.

Nicole: *sighs*

Mahabi: What, what's wrong? Bad dream?

Nicole: *nods quickly*

Mahabi: Well, we all got bad dreams sometimes...

Nicole: Wh-Where's Terry?

Mahabi: He's taking a shower upstairs.

Nicole: Th-There's hot water?

Mahabi: Yeah, but, not for long. The boiler keeps on failing...

Nicole: ... Ah...

Terry: WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!! COLD!!!

Mahabi: See, there it goes again.

Nicole: And Lattei?

Mahabi: Getting changed.

Nicole: Aah...

Mahabi: Getting extra clothes always comes in handy so see if there's anything you like upstairs and take it with you.

Mahabi went upstairs to look for stuff, but I had to recover for a moment... Such a freaky dream...

After a while, I went upstairs to see if there was anything... There wasn't much left, but a few wardrobe closets with a few jeans and shirts and collars and everything were still there. It was a huge mess and everything but I didn't really mind. I closed the door behind me and looked for clothes that fit me. Tried a lot, and took only the most relevant clothing. Seeing as autumn was about to start, I thought it was best to take warm clothes... I looked for a backpack to stuff the clothing in, but as I was raiding the closets, a lot of books fell down. One of them caught my attention as it fell open, and I noticed it was a photo album... I picked it up and looked at it, and there were pictures of a young human girl, surrounded by other humans who seem to be her friends. As I was flipping through the pages, I saw a lot of other pictures... So I sat down in the corner and took a good look at it...

I was carried away by looking at those pictures, but got snapped out of it as the door was opening and I heard Terry humming. I sat down in the corner that was next to the door, so he didn't see me. Terry was still wet from the shower as he was still wearing a towel around his waist... But... As soon as he started to take the towel off, I saw a glimpse of his butt and... Well, his best "friend"... I couldn't help it but... I giggled...

Nicole: Teehee...

Then he turned around and his eyes were wide open. As soon as he noticed me, he quickly grabbed his towel again...

Terry: Whoa!! Geez!! What the hell!!! Where the hell did you come from?!!

Nicole: I got here first, you know!

Terry: My clothes are over there!! I got here first!!

Then the door opened up and Lattei walked through...

Lattei: Hey Terry, I think I figured out the-

All: ...

Lattei: Never mind, you guys look busy.

Nicole: It's not what it looks like!!

Mahabi: Ooh!! What'd I missed?!!

Terry: A little privacy wouldn't hurt ya know!!

Mahabi: Oh Terry, I found the perfect thing for you.

Terry: What, doggy biscuits?

Mahabi: No, this.

At that point, he catapulted a thong in Terry's face... That came so all of a sudden, and we just burst out in tears of laughter... Especially when we saw the look on Terry's face afterwards...

Terry: Will you get the hell out of the room already?!! Thank you!!

So we left the room while we were still laughing...

That night, we set out again. We kept on moving towards Azerbaijan, and it was still a long journey... We passed all sorts of little towns and villages on the way, and like always, there were the same things... Dead bodies and all that, you know what it's like...

Walking through another destroyed town brought my mood down once again. Seeing bodies lifelessly on the ground was rather shocking, but it wasn't something I was surprised to see anymore... The scary thing was, that I was starting to get used to it. Any normal person would have a mental breakdown while setting their eyes upon a decapitated human or a furrie whose legs got blown off. But I was starting to get used to it...

No one said anything while we walked through the deserted streets. A soft breeze was waving over us as the stench of death was in the air. Another thing I got used to. Tiny snowflakes twirled down from the cold, dark red sky, gently floating down. As I looked down, I noticed our footsteps in the snow and other footsteps as well. You can tell there was a struggle here, a battle over life and death, forgotten as time went on and the tiny snowflakes covered it up... The whole view was beautiful as well as gruesome to see... Then the wind didn't sound so breezy anymore... It sounded like thousands of people slowly dieing and screaming out their agony... The whole fairy tale image started to fade away slowly until I saw the blood stained ground... And it was then I hit the ground and opened my eyes. For what I was seeing was the truth. And the truth was gruesome...

At some point, we noticed that we were followed by a shadow. Terry reacted immediately. He turned around and aimed his weapon at the figure. We didn't see it at first. But as we noticed the shadow stopped moving, we went towards it, with Terry leading the way. Then all of a sudden, something came out from behind an alley. Terry aimed his weapon at it, and I was the first to notice it was a human little girl... She got so frightened by the sudden aim Terry took with his weapon on her...

Nicole: Terry, no!!

Then he quickly lowers his weapon and looked at the human girl. Mahabi and Lattei joined as well and looked a bit baffled at her...

Mahabi: A human...?

Nicole: Yeah...

She looked at us with big eyes, but didn't say anything. I think she wasn't older than five years... So I walked up to her slowly and kneeled before her...

Nicole: Heey...

Girl: ... Hi...

Nicole: What's your name...?

Girl: R-Rachel... What's yours...?

Nicole: I'm Nicole...

She looked around nervously at Terry and the others...

Nicole: Where are your parents...?

Rachel: I-I don't know... Mommy said that when daddy came home, everything would be fine... B-But I don't know where they are now...

Nicole: Yeah...

Rachel: My little brother is here too!

Nicole: He is...?

Rachel: *nods*

Nicole: Where is he...?

She took my hand and we walked down the alley while the others followed... Then she pointed to a small boy that was on the ground...

Rachel: He fell asleep, a-and didn't wake up... I t-ried to wake him up but he's not waking up...

I looked at Terry and the others and feared the worst. Terry kneeled down next to the little boy and felt for any signs of life. Then he looked at us and shakes his head in an almost inconspicuous way... He was dead...

Nicole: Oh my...

Rachel: Hm?

Nicole: Rachel? I'll tell you what...

Rachel: Hmm-mm?

Nicole: We are also looking for people. So... Why don't you come with us and we'll look for your parents together?

Rachel: O-okay...

Terry: You hungry Rachel?

Rachel looked scared at Terry. Well, a guy with his posture and deep voice is intimidating for a kid... She clenches on my leg as Terry got close to her and gave her a piece of bread. She looked with wide eyes at Terry again, and he just smiled. But as he smiled, his sharp canine teeth were visible, which probably intimidated her more... She takes the bread with shaky hands... After she ate it, we started walking east. But I noticed she couldn't really keep up. I waited for her and picked her up and carried her. She gently strokes my long hair as she placed her chin on my shoulder. I could see in the corners of my eyes that she was exhausted. Then not long after that, she fell asleep, while I kept carrying her and wondering what she ever did to deserve this...

14 - Pink...

I stared outside the roof window of the sickbay... I saw tiny snowflakes twirling down, which was rather odd. It was only the beginning of October and yet there was snow. They treated us for the wounds we had from the crash, and Shifty's condition was still critical. As for me, I wasn't that badly injured. I was in a warm, comfortable bed, so I wasn't complaining... The deep cut in my leg kept on opening, like it didn't want to heal. Walking went rather painful and it didn't get any better that the same leg was dislocated. I noticed I had a bandage wrapped around my head. I had a wound on my head without even knowing. But I did feel it, except I didn't know it was that bad... The medic said I need a lot of rest, and keep walking to a minimum. I wouldn't mind... All I ever did was to catch up on sleep... [br]

[br]

I wasn't alone in the room. The last room got crowded so I got placed in a different one, along with some others who weren't in the crash. And that girl with the glasses was next to me. She never said anything to us but that night, she turned to me... [br]

[br]

???: How are you doing...? [br]

Blain: ... What...? [br]

???: How are you...? [br]

Blain: Eh... I'm ok I guess... I'm still alive so... It's not that bad... [br]

???: Hehe... [br]

Blain: ... You? [br]

???: I'm doing alright... I twist my ankles but... I'll manage... [br]

Blain: Ah, that's good to hear... [br]

[br]

???: That sure was a bumpy ride, wasn't it...? [br]

Blain: Hehe, yeah it was... I can't help it that Jarod drives like an idiot... I mean... Heh...[br]

[br]

???: I'm Kitty... [br]

Blain: I'm Blain... [br]

Kitty: Nice to meet you...[br]

Blain: ... Likewise...[br]

[br]

Kitty: *sighs* [br]

Blain: Hm? [br]

Kitty: I wanna get out of here... [br]

Blain: You just got here... I mean, there's no safer place to be right now.... [br]

Kitty: No, no, I mean the sickbay... [br]

Blain: Oh? [br]

Kitty: ... Yeah... There are hundreds of people seeking refuge in the base, and all I do is just sitting here while I could go look for people in the crowds... [br]

[br]

Blain: Same here... But I don't complain of the way they treat us... I mean... Hot food, nice showers, getting pampered like that... It's way better here than to be out there you know... But still... I'm very eager to look for people myself... But it's not like their going anywhere... If their here, they'll stay... [br]

[br]

Then I noticed she fell asleep. I wasn't that boring was I...? [br]

[br]

It stayed pretty much the same for a week. I talked to Kitty a lot and was discharged from the sickbay. After she left, it was rather boring and dull around here. One by one, everyone from the room got discharged from the sickbay, except for one guy. Talking to him didn't really help at all, because he was in coma and died a few days later. Luckily, Tavish, Jarod and Rico visited a lot and whenever they came over, the time passed a lot faster... Then one evening, Jarod was visiting me alone... [br]

[br]

Jarod: Evening sarge... [br]

Blain: 'Sup Jarod? How you doing?[br]

Jarod: I can't complain really... Still have to take a rest, but at least I'm out of the sickbay... [br]

[br]

Blain: Hehe, and the others...? [br]

Jarod: Well, Rico keeps on doging his @\$\$ hurts and that I drive like shoot. [br]

Blain: And Tavish? [br]

Jarod: He's doing very well. He said he met some girl he likes. [br]

Blain: I thought Jarod didn't want a girl... [br]

Jarod: Yeah same here. I thought Tavish was a fag when he said that, but guess I was wrong. He just doesn't shut up about her. [br]

[br]

Blain: So you had to get away from his blabbering then? [br]

Jarod: Yup... One of the reasons... Also to check on how you were doing, sir. [br]

Blain: Jarod? [br]

Jarod: Yes, sir? [br]

Blain: Cut out with the formalities and manners here, will ya...? [br]

Jarod: Whadda ya mean sir? [br]

Blain: The whole "sir" and "sarge" thing... It's not like we're in the MNAF anymore... Just call me Blain... [br]

[br]

[br]

Jarod: Yes sir. [br]

Blain: ... Blain. [br]

Jarod: I'm sorry, but it's something I gotta get used to. [br]

Blain: Hehehehe... [br]

Jarod: Anyway, how you're doing...? [br]

Blain: Well, getting better actually... Just a few more days and I'll be out... [br]

Jarod: Oh great, you'll get to see Tavish' girl then. [br]

Blain: What's she like? [br]

Jarod: ... Well, obviously not really my taste, but... She's pink. I mean... Pink for frack's sake... Do I need to say more? [br]

[br]

Blain: Hehehe... I get it... [br]

[br]

Jarod: Yeah... Good...[br]

Blain: So who's running this place? [br]

Jarod: Some captain or something barking out orders... [br]

Blain: He does? [br]

Jarod: Yeah, we even got human POW's. [br]

Blain: What?!! Ow!! frack!! [br]

[br]

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Human prisoners of warfare...? You gotta be fracking shooting me... I was so baffled by that, I jumped up, but it hurt my leg... [br]

[br]

Jarod: Easy dude. [br]

Blain: How many...? [br]

Jarod: Around forty or something... [br]

Blain: Forty?!! What the hell are they planning to do with them?! [br]

Jarod: No idea... [br]

[br]

Something wasn't right about this whole deal. Especially with the forty prisoners. Whoever this captain might be, he sure was making the wrong decisions... Forty prisoners...? What the hell is he planning to do with them...? Not only would they drain our supplies, but... It's a total waste of energy... And letting them go, isn't an option... If we let them go and they got picked up by GUN again, they would know our location and could jeopardize this entire facility... No... There had to be another way... I kept on thinking throughout the night, but couldn't come up with a solution...

[br]

[br]

A week passed by... The first thing I did once I was discharged from the sickbay was to take a really hot shower. I found a small room which would serve as my "house". It contains a bed, a few chairs, a table, wardrobe and that's it. A small bathroom with a toilette... A sink... I got out of my uniform and took a shower... Then I wore my tank top and the pants of my uniform along with the boots and flopped down on the bed... Fresh bed sheets... [br]

[br]

Then all of a sudden, there was a knock on the door. [br]

[br]

Rico: The captain wants to see your sir. [br]

Blain: I'm on my way. [br]

[br]

I got up and looked for the captain. Regan was talking to him when I got to them... [br]

[br]

Blain: Sergeant Blain, reporting in as ordered sir. [br]

Captain: At east. [br]

Regan: Look who's finally out. Hehehe. How you doing? [br]

Blain: Hmm. Can't complain... [br]

Captain: Alright, enough chit-chat. You guys know why I summoned you? [br]

Blain/Regan: No sir. [br]

[br]

Captain: Alright. To cut a long story short: You guys got the highest rank in this whole base besides me. I want you guys under my supervision. [br]

[br]

Blain: Doing what, sir? [br]

Captain: To keep everything running here. [br]

Regan: I see. [br]

Captain: Follow me. [br]

[br]

We followed the captain to a lower level of the facility. We reached a place full of high security technological stuff and saw lots of steel doors. At some point, we reached a place that was known as “the shoothole”... As soon as the captain opened that door, we knew why it was called like that... Forty humans, all packed up behind steel bars in different cell blocks... As we were walking through, they all yelled at us and called us names... [br]

[br]

Captain: Alright!!! Shut the hell up!! I got a message for ya!! [br]

[br]

Then they all shut up... [br]

[br]

Captain: This goes for the new guys we picked up yesterday!! Welcome to your new home!! We will make sure we'll make you're stay as pleasant as possible!! If you have complaints, write them down on a note!! And then you can shove it up your @\$!! If you have complaints about the food!! Write it down!! And sergeant Regan will help by shoving it up you're @\$!! That's all, people!! [br]

[br]

Then we left again... [br]

[br]

Captain: frackin' humans... [br]

Regan: Yeah... [br]

Blain: Sir, permission to speak free sir. [br]

Captain: Go on. [br]

Blain: I don't think we need POW's, sir. They will only drain us from supplies... [br]

Captain: So you wanna kill everyone you get in your sight. [br]

Blain: That's... The basic idea sir. [br]

[br]

Captain: Do I need to remind you, sergeant that WE are on a peace mission?! WE are trying to avoid the events that happened several years ago, to avoid provoking a full blown war here!! [br]

[br]

Blain: I risk the lives of me and my men, just to make some prisoners?! [br]

[br]

Captain: You risk your life in order for peace to remain on this fracking mudball!!! You risk it so that everyone can sleep properly at night!! [br]

[br]

Blain: Well I hope you can sleep properly tonight, knowing you made a few prisoners which ended up in the killing of over a millions of our guys... [br]

[br]

Captain: You are going way out of line sergeant!! Stand in attention when I'm talking to you!!! [br]

[br]

Blain: ... Sir. [br]

[br]

Then I looked at him and walked off with Regan... [br]

[br]

On the way, I encountered Tavish... [br]

[br]

Tavish: Heeeeeeeeeeeeeey!! Look who's finally out!! How you doing sarge?!! [br]

Blain: Good, good. You? [br]

Tavish: Can't complain. [br]

Blain: Hehehe... Any word from Shifty...? [br]

Tavish: Nope... Still critical... [br]

Blain: *sighs* [br]

Jarod: He'll be alright... [br]

Blain: Yeah. [br]

Tavish: Oh!! I want you to meet someone!! *walks away* [br]

Jarod: *whispers* Here she comes... [br]

Blain: *whispers* Who...? [br]

Jarod: *chuckles* [br]

[br]

Then Tavish came back with a girl. She was pink, like Jarod said but... As soon as she looked at me, she was all baffled. I realized I've seen her face before... Took me a while to realize it was Amy... [br]

[br]

Blain: Amy...? [br]

Tavish: ... Uh... Yeah... How'd you know that...? [br]

Amy: B-Blain...? [br]

Tavish: ... Am I missing something here...? [br]

Blain: It is you!! [br]

Amy: Blain!!! [br]

[br]

Then I just hugged her as she was still baffled... I was so happy to see her alive and well... [br]

[br]

Amy: Ow!! Easy on me!! [br]

Blain: Sorry, sorry... What... Wh-what happened...? [br]

Amy: I eh... L-let's go to my room to talk, ok...? [br]

[br]

So I walked away with Amy... [br]

[br]

Jarod: Looks like she's already taken, Tavish... [br]

Tavish: ... Son of a dog!! [br]

[br]

Once we reached her room, she knocked on the door and peeked her head around... [br]

[br]

Amy: You'll never guess who I found...[br]

???: Who is it...? [br]

Amy: Come on... [br]

[br]

Deep inside of me, I was hoping it was Nicole who was waiting inside for me... As I got through the door, I was a bit disappointed to see it was Sonic... It's not like I wasn't glad to see him, but... The way he looked at me was... A bit freaky... [br]

[br]

Sonic: Well, who is it...? [br]

[br]

It was so weird... Sonic was staring right at me but... It was like he didn't see me at all... He kept on staring in front of him as Amy guided me towards him... And... I didn't know what was up with him... Amy got Sonic's hand and placed it on my left arm... He felt it and all of a sudden, his eyes widened... [br]

[br]

Sonic: B-Blain...? [br]

Blain: Hey Sonic... [br]

Sonic: Is it really you...? [br]

Blain: Yeah... How you doing, buddy...? [br]

[br]

His hands went up to my face. He touched my face, and kept feeling it... [br]

[br]

Sonic: It really is you... [br]

[br]

Then all of a sudden, he grabbed my arm and gently pulled me down as he hugged me... Then Amy sat down on the bed, and all of a sudden, the three of us burst out in tears as we all hold each other... [br]

[br]

After sitting for like at least an hour like that, questions were starting to rise... [br]

[br]

Sonic: Ho-How did you survive Blain...? Everyone thought you were dead... We all heard about the titan being shot down a-and that there were no survivors... [br]

[br]

Blain: Eh... The only why I'm still alive... Is... When the attack started, I was out with... A few guys from my squad... I was... at the back of the titan joking and talking with these guys... Then all of a sudden, one of the gunships caught fire and went down... And... Not long after that, all hell broke loose... The titan shield got brought down quickly by missiles... And we ran to the far back of the titan as it was going down... We wouldn't be alive if we were somewhere else... [br]

[br]

Amy: Ooh... [br]

Blain: But... That wasn't the main reason why so many people lost their lives during that attack... [br]

[br]

Sonic: What happened...? [br]

Blain: Artillery barrages... It's eh... We lost a lot of guys and... Out of the five hundred thousand furies stationed on the titan, only 36 got out alive... And that's uh... A colossal loss in epic proportions...
sighs[br]

[br]

[br]

Amy: I see... [br]

Blain: Then... We... Headed for known bases, but everywhere we went, it was the same... It all got annihilated... At some point, we found a few guys and... We got over here... [br]

[br]

It stayed silent for a long time...[br]

[br]

Blain: ... How did you guys survived...? [br]

[br]

Amy: I eh... I don't really- It's... It was so chaotic... The night we left the village... Everything looked fine until everyone started to scream and... [br]

[br]

Sonic: *sighs* [br]

Blain: ... Then what happened...? [br]

Sonic: Some... Kind of bomb... Windows shattered all of a sudden and, it got really bright... Then it was all black... And... Stayed black ever since... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... Are you blind...? [br]

Sonic: Well what the hell does it look like?! [br]

Blain: ... I'm- I'm sorry... I... [br]

Sonic: *sighs* You couldn't have known... I'm... I'm sorry... I shouldn't be-[br]

Blain: Hey, it's ok... Go on... [br]

Sonic: We eh... Got here a few weeks ago... Once we got out of the city, we made our way to a depot, where there was an airtransport waiting... [br]

[br]

Blain: And then you got to Azerbaijan...? [br]

Amy: No... The airtransport was shot down on the way... We were the only survivors along with a few others... And after walking for a few days, we arrived... [br]

[br]

Blain: I see... What about the others...? What about Nicole?! [br]

Amy: Blain... [br]

Blain: Yeah...? [br]

Amy: You'll have to understand that... The situation was very chaotic... And... I did see Nicole but... We all got separated in the chaos... I don't know what happened to her... [br]

[br]

Blain: *sighs*[br]

Amy: I'm sorry... [br]

Blain: What about... What about everyone else...? Knuckles...? Lara-Su...? Julie-Su...? Shadow...? Rouge...
... Cody...? ...Tails...?[br]

[br]

Amy: I don't know... Tails... Tails was with us but... He got hit by gunfire... and... he... he died instantly... [br]

[br]

Blain: What...? [br]

[br]

Amy's expression turned so serious and sad by the second... There isn't really a way to describe her but... I think her said enough what she was going through when she saw how one of her lifelong friends was killed... And that'll leave a mark for life... All she was nodding... Her lips started shaking...[br]

[br]

Blain: Oh no... [br]

Amy: Yeah... [br]

Blain: W-what about Cody...? [br]

Sonic: *shakes no*[br]

Blain: ... What...? [br]

Sonic: Cody... Cody... didn't survive the crash... Tails and... And Cody are the only ones we know for sure

that... That they didn't make it... [br]

[br]

Then I looked back at Amy and she nodded... Then we just sat like that for a while until I heard Amy sobbing quietly... And not long after that, we all burst out in tears once again... [br]

[br]

After a long time, I went to my own room. I didn't want to see anyone. I just wanted to be alone. I flopped down on my bed and cried silently... I was so sick and tired of being uncertain of things... To wonder if anyone else made it... And although chances were slim that they made it, it still hit me like a brick to hear that Tails and Cody didn't make it... But as long as its unconfirmed, I keep having hope that everyone else is still alive out there, especially Nicole... [br]

[br]

Thinking about everything Sonic and Amy told me made me very sad... Yet again, the more I thought about it, the angrier I got. But for some reason, all I could think of were the prisoners and the captain... If he intends to keep them, I'll make sure he wont... And if he doesn't resign... I'll make sure we were doing it right... I was thinking about mutiny to get this place as safe as possible... And I was actually determined, angry, and confident enough to carry it out... Alone if I had to... I'll make sure my friends didn't die in vein... All I need was a plan... And if the captain kept making the wrong decisions, it wouldn't take long before everyone will commit mutiny... I didn't know it back then but... Things were gonna get real ugly in just a week... [br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

15 - A bridge too far...

Rachel never asked questions. Throughout the week we travelled together, she never asked where her parents were, or what happened to her little brother. Maybe she already knew or, maybe she didn't realize it... But whatever it was, she loved being with us. You could see that in her eyes...

We've been walking with Rachel for a week now. One night, Terry was carrying her. She slept all through the day, while we all carried her in turn, and that night, it was Terry's turn. She woke up a few hours ago, and didn't fall asleep ever since... Maybe it was because Terry was keeping her busy...

Terry: Alright, alright, alright! Let's go over it again, little dude. Watch me closely.

Rachel: Okay...

Terry: *growls*

Rachel: Grrr...!!

Terry: ... We need to work on that.

Rachel: Show me again!

Terry: *growls*

Rachel: Grrrrr!!

Terry: ... Almost, but not quite.

Rachel: Grrrrrrrrrrhrhrhrrrrrr!!

Terry: Oooh, scary!! Do that angry face again!

Rachel: *pulls angry face*

Terry: Yeah!! That's it, little dude!!

Rachel: Heehee!

Mahabi: She's a human, she cant growl like you...

Terry: Yeah, and she can't purr like you either.

Mahabi: Purr?

Lattei: *laughs*

Mahabi: Excuse me?!

Terry: Yeah! I heard you purring whenever you were asleep...

Mahabi: ... I don't purr.

As Mahabi and Terry kept on discussing whether or not Mahabi was purring in his sleep, I noticed that Lattei looked around cautiously... He kept his hands close the sheaths of the swords and he lifted one of them up by moving his thumb up...

Nicole: What's up...?

Lattei: ... Head's up, we got company...

Then all of a sudden, we heard something coming out of the bushes... Terry and Mahabi aimed their weapons at the bushes, but lowered them as soon as we saw what it was. A group of 8 guys, all furies... But for some reason, Lattei kept his hands close to his swords...

Terry: You guys scared us...

Wolf: Damn, are we glad to see you guys.

Mahabi: Same here.

Wolf: Where are you guys heading?

Terry: Azerbaijan.

Wolf: Oh! That's where we're going as well.

Terry: Oh good.

Wolf: Not to be rude or anything, but... You guys happen to have something to eat...?

Terry: Yeah, of course.

So Terry got down to take off his backpack but... As soon as he looked up, the wolf aimed two pistols at Terry's head... Lattei immediately draws his two swords and Mahabi took his aim... Then all of the other guys aimed at us as well...

Wolf: Oh, well in that case, give us everything you got.

Terry: ... Are you fracking mental...?

Wolf: Are you so naïve...? Give it... *presses guns against Terry's head*

Terry lets go of Rachel as she got behind me and he tossed the backpack in the middle of Mahabi and Lattei...

Wolf: You think I'm retarded or something...? Tell you're guys to drop their weapons...

Terry: ... Do it...

Mahabi: ... There's no way I'm gonna let these guys take from us what took us a lot of effort to get...

Terry: Do it Mahabi...

Then they dropped their weapons... The wolf walked up to the backpack and all of a sudden, Lattei kicked dust in his face, and kicked up a sword and stabbed him in the chest. He placed his foot on the wolf's chest, and kicked him down... The others were so baffled by that, but quickly recovered and took their aim again... Terry and Mahabi got down quickly and grabbed their weapons as I ran away with Rachel... I jumped up a tree and held Rachel close as we could follow the gunfight below... I held my hands around Rachel's eyes but... I could see everything... Lattei got hold of his other sword, and rolled over to one of those guys. He chopped the legs of the guy just below the knee with a cross swipe as he fell down... And Terry and Mahabi just sought cover and shot to whoever was out there... But Lattei punched someone in the face with the grip of the sword, and as the guy he punched fell back, he quickly stabbed him in the back...

It all happened in a blink of an eye... And as I looked around, they were all dead... Mahabi and Terry threw away their weapons as Lattei was wiping his swords clean...

Terry: Where's Nicole?!!

Nicole: Up here!!

Terry: Rachel?!!

Nicole: She's with me!!

Mahabi: It's all clear!! Come on down!!

Nicole: Ok... Ok... Rachel...?

Rachel: Y-Yeah...?

Mahabi: Nicole!!! Hurry up!!

Nicole: I'm coming!! Rachel...? Hold on to me ok? And whatever you do, don't look. Don't look ok...?

Rachel: *nods*

Nicole: Ok... Here we go... One... Two... Three...

I carefully let myself down from the tree. It reminded me that I fell out of a tree and got stuck between the branches on the way down a long time ago... I felt how Rachel was clamping on my arms as her chin rest on my shoulder as I walked over to the others... But... I heard a soft whimper as Rachel grip tightened around my arms... And... I felt how a tear was hitting my shoulder... As I turned my head, I noticed she looked anyway...

Nicole: Sssh... It's ok Rachel... We're leaving now ok...?

Terry was searching the bodies for something. He got out a few cartons, but I didn't know what it was...

Terry: Yeah, let's go, right now.

Lattei: ... Yeah, you got everything?

Mahabi: Yeah.

Nicole: You guys ok...?

Terry: *nods*

Mahabi: I'm fine...

Lattei: *nods slowly*

Mahabi: You still got a few clips Terry? I'm out...

Terry: No, I'm out too...

Mahabi: Damn it...

Terry: Thanks to this son of a dog!! *kicks corpse*

We got our stuff and walked away without saying anything and without looking back...

We didn't talk for hours. Every once in a while, you hear someone sigh and we only talked when it was necessary... We spend the night in a tree, and took cover from the pouring rain. We sat on the branches and tried to stay dry by holding blankets over our heads. And what's worse was that it was a cold night... We didn't get much sleep...

Walking went slow the other day... Everyone became so tired of the same routine each day and it was exhausting... We haven't eaten all day, and water became scarce too. Luckily, it was raining the night before, so we just stuck our hands holding the bottles outside the blanket and just wait until it was filled up...

But as night came over us again, we came across this really big river. There was a bridge in the distance

that has been shot to pieces, but it's still possible to cross over it.

Terry: ... Who's up for a skinny dip?!

Nicole: ... I'll pass.

Lattei: There's no way you can swim that distance...

Mahabi: Yeah, and besides, the current way too strong...

Terry: You think the bridge will hold...?

Lattei: ... By the looks of it, yeah... It misses a few chunks of concrete and reinforced steel cables, but it should hold us...

Terry: ... Oh fracking hell, not again...

Nicole: What...?!

Terry: Lattei, sword!!

Lattei: What?!

Terry: Gimme!!

Terry yanked from the sheath a sword out that Lattei was carrying. Terry listened closely and turned around so all of a sudden. He pointed the sword downwards, and we could see a hedgehog's face... He was crawling through the bushes...

Terry: Don't you fracking move, or I'll gut you like a fracking shish-kebab!!!

The hedgehog got up slowly from the bushes... Once he got in the moonlight, we noticed he was brown, fluffy and had a shackle around his neck... He didn't really seem that old, but he looked all baffled as he didn't say anything... Terry pressed the sword against his throat...

Terry: Who else is out there...? Call them out...

???: Oh shoot, they got Axel...

Terry: Lattei...!!

Lattei: Got it.

Lattei backed Terry up by standing next to him, sword ready. As soon as we heard they were coming out of the bushes, Terry violently pulled the brown hedgehog over and pressed the sword against his throat again. The hedgehog seemed to be calm though... He didn't say anything, but we understood why he was so calm once they all got out of the bushes... More furries got out... Like... A lot... They weren't armed, but we were so outnumbered that Terry had to let go of him...

Terry: ... Dayumn... Where the hell did they all come from...?

Lattei: No idea...

Tigress: What the hell is the matter with you?!! Huh?!! We're on your side!!

Terry: ... That's what we thought when we encountered a smaller group like yourselves earlier...

Hedgehog: What?

Mahabi: Yeah. They tried to steal our stuff...

Terry: Hell, they even threatened us by pressing guns to our heads...

Hedgehog: I don't believe that...

Terry: That's not my problem whether or not you believe it.

Mahabi: Let's go.

I looked at the group before continued our way. They all looked baffled at each other and we walked off...

But not long after that, we got caught up by them...

Tigress: Where you guys heading...?

Terry: Azerbaijan.

Hedgehog: Why?

Lattei: There's an underground base there.

Mahabi: With refugees.

Nicole: *nods*

Terry: Way better then spending the days outside...

Tigress: Is it possible we... We could tag along with you?

Lattei: Depends.

Tigress: Whadda ya mean?

Terry: You got weapons?

Hedgehog: Yeah, sort of.

Lattei: You know how to defend yourselves?

Tigress: *shows claws*

Mahabi: You want our supplies?

Tigress/Hedgehog: No.

Hedgehog: ... We got our own.

Terry: Good, tag along then.

Then the hedgehog looked over to the others and nodded to follow... We were with a group of around 15 people. And so we set out to the bridge. Once we got there, it was a set back to discover there was no way to get over it. The road got blocked with a lot of debris as deformed steel structures were down. We had to climb over it to get to the bridge. Once we all got over it, we started walking the long bridge. The more we walked, the higher it became... I looked up in the distance and noticed the bridge was very long... Way longer then I imagined...

Terry: Where's Rachel?

Nicole: She's with Lattei.

Mahabi: *chuckles*

Terry: What?

Mahabi: *laughs*

Terry: What?!

Mahabi: Seriously...

Terry: What?! What?!!

Mahabi: "Gut you like a fracking shish-kebab...?" Dude... Holy shoot... Even when the odds are against you, you're trying to be funny... *laughs*

Terry: Hey, I wasn't trying to be funny, you know.

Mahabi: Hehehe... He was scared shootless...

Terry: ...

Mahabi: ... *laughs*

Terry: Oh shut up...

Mahabi: "Shish-kebab"...? Dude, how the hell do you come up with stuff like that man... *laughs*

Terry: *sighs*

Mahabi: You just fancied my tickle box... *laughs*

Terry: Oh just shut the hell up...

Not long after that... We heard something terrifying... Jet engines of gunships... It was too dark to see but at first, we thought they're with the good guys. Terry, Mahabi and I got down as low as possible so that the gunships might not notice us... But... In the sudden burst of panic, people started running... And that's when the gunships started to fire... I didn't really know how many it were... But they came closer, so we had no choice but to run as well. I saw Lattei running in the distance, carrying Rachel as the bullets were whizzing by... A lot of people got shot off the bridge while we were still running as fast as we could. I heard ricochets all around me and at some point I tripped over something and fell down... Mahabi reached out a hand and dragged me along... I didn't know what caused it, but we got hit by something... Mahabi got knocked down to his left and fell over the edge, dragging me along... I could barely hold on to a steel structure that was just underneath the bridge to support the pillars. I tried to hold on to Mahabi, but he was too heavy for me to hold as he was dangling below me unconscious... I yelled his name, trying to wake him up, but he just didn't... And not long after that, I couldn't hold on to him anymore... I saw how Mahabi fell a long way down into the big river below... I tried calling for help, but no one was answering me as screaming and yelling slowly faded off... Once again, I heard a ricochet, and a sharp pain in my right arm... I yelled it out and slipped... I fell a long way down and splashed in the ice cold water... And it just hurt so much... The cold water made it feel as if I was being stabbed with a thousand knives... I tried to stay at the surface, but got dragged down under water... And I couldn't use my right arm... It hurt so much for some reason, but I didn't realized what caused it... And not long after that, I got pulled under water...

Voices were echoing throughout my head... Unknown voices... But also familiar ones... I heard it... I've been there... I've witnessed it all... Limbs were floating gently across the water surface, as bullets hit the water at a fast rate... It was such a surreal sight... The muffled sounds of gunfire above the surface and people yelling... I saw another body slowly sinking towards the bottom... I couldn't feel anything as my limbs turned numb by the ice cold water... And at that point, only one thought was running through my mind... "Let your lungs fill with water..." "Come on..." "It'll be over soon..." "Come on damn it... Do it..." The clear bright water slowly colored dark red... Images of my life went by so fast... Blain... I saw him as well... I remember him all too well... Blain... I love you so much... I couldn't go like this... Not without seeing him again and tell him how much I loved him... How much he means to me... Just one more time... That's all... It slowly turned black as I got swallowed up by the darkness and the cold... No.....Not like this...

I drifted upwards... I saw the surface got closer by the second... My head was kept above water as my eyes were wide open... I could see the clear night sky but didn't hear anything... Every now and then, I could see the water in front of my eyes until I reached land... But even when I was shoved on land, I didn't feel anything... I felt myself drifting away as I noticed Terry's face above mine... He was yelling at me but I didn't hear what he was saying... I couldn't move... I didn't blink my eyes... I couldn't think... I got rolled on my right side and I noticed Lattei taking care of Mahabi as Rachel stands near by... Then I

got rolled on my back again, and saw the pretty stars... Terry was doing something as he kept on yelling in my face... And then it felt like I was hitting the ground... Every feeling came back again... Pain, cold, everything... I regurgitated water and had really nasty coughs as I got rolled on my side again...

Terry: That's it... Let it all out...

Nicole: *gasps and coughs*

Terry helped me to sit up right, but as soon as he let go, I fell down as I kept gasping for air. He helped me getting up again and leaned against me so that I stayed up. I kept panting and gasping my lungs out and kept on regurgitating water... After a while, I was so exhausted, that I just fell down...

16 - Why...?

Tavish was pretty pissed about the fact I knew Amy. He thought we had something together or something, but luckily, that mistake got cleared up very quick. But that wasn't our biggest concern... For the past week, the decisions the captain made were, as we expected, downright wrong. A few days ago, he sent out a small group to gather supplies, but they haven't returned. They either got shot to pieces or got captured. What pissed me off was that he was making decisions on his own, and without discussing his plans with others. So far, the human prisoners got treated like they own the place, and everything they ask for got granted. And that's just the tip of the iceberg... We were so sick and tired of that so we're about to take measures in our own hands... Jarod, Scyth, Rico, Regan and I gathered around one night... [br]

[br]

Regan: Any word of them yet...? [br]

Jarod: No sir... [br]

Rico: I can't take this shoot no more... Everyone sees he's making the wrong decisions and yet they keep supporting him... [br]

[br]

Blain: Do you know people who want to get rid of him as well...? [br]

Scyth: ... I do. [br]

Blain: Where...? [br]

Scyth: The south block... Most of them want to get rid of him... [br]

Blain: Anyone else...? [br]

Scyth: No, not that I know off... [br]

Jarod: How many of them...? [br]

Scyth: About a hundred... [br]

Jarod: That's not enough...[br]

Blain: What...? [br]

Jarod: Look, we are outnumbered right now... Its not gonna succeed, even IF the south block is on our side... [br]

[br]

Regan: We gotta find a way to stir things up... [br]

Rico: How you're planning to do that...?[br]

Blain: You know someone who wants to get rid of him for sure...? [br]

[br]

Scyth: Eh... One of the battlewalker pilots... What's his name...? Vi... Vi something... He was one of the guys that helped us after the crash...[br]

[br]

Blain: Vijay? [br]

Scyth: Yeah, that's him. Nice guy really, he probably knows people too... [br]

Blain: Alright... Go to him, and explain the whole story... Ask him if there are more people who wanna get rid of him... We'll approach the others and get this thing started... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Will do. [br]

Blain: Keep in mind that this stays between us... If they find out what we're up to, it's over for us...

Hoo-ah...? [br]

[br]

All: Hoo-ah... [br]

[br]

And so it happened... Scyth made contact with Vijay; Vijay passed the information on to people he trusted while he supplies us with names... And so, the news of a mutiny spread like a wild fire... In just a day, everyone who was against him was informed. Throughout the next day, I got a hunch that the opposite party was aware that something was up... So we had to keep a lower profile and used notes to pass information on... We got everything ready and tonight, we're executing the mutiny... [br]

[br]

That evening, I went to the sickbay to check up on Shifty...[br]

[br]

Shifty: ... Hey, sarge...! How you doing? [br]

Blain: 'Sup Shifty. [br]

Shifty: I'm a frackin' mess here sir... I fractured my arm, and my @\$@ still hurts... [br]

[br]

Blain: Too many rectal painkillers? [br]

Shifty: Hehehe... Naah I wish... Rectal painkillers wouldn't hurt that much... [br]

Blain: When do you get out...? [br]

Shifty: Soon, hopefully. Everything's gonna get better... [br]

Blain: Alright... I think you should stay for a while... [br]

Shifty: What, you don't want me to get out sir? [br]

Blain: No, no, that's not it. [br]

Shifty: Then what is...? [br]

Blain: *looks around* [br]

Shifty: What is it...? [br]

Blain: *shoves note in Shifty's hand* [br]

Shifty: What the hell is this...? [br]

Blain: Read it when I'm gone. Then you'll understand. [br]

Shifty: ... What's with all secrecy here sir.....? [br]

Blain: Trust me... Once you've read that note, rip it into tiny little bits, to make it unreadable, and throw it away. Remember what it says. [br]

[br]

Shifty: Will do sir... Is it some kind of mission sir...? [br]

Blain: Yeah, sorta... [br]

Shifty: ... Can I ask what the mission is sir...? [br]

Blain: It's a Nunya mission... [br]

Shifty: ... Nunya mission...? [br]

Blain: Yeah... Nunya damn business... [br]

Shifty: Hehehe... Ow... Don't make me laugh, my chest still hurts... [br]

Blain: Hehehehe... [br]

Shifty: *sighs* [br]

Blain: ... You're gonna eat that sandwich? [br]

Shifty: Well I- [br]

Blain: *grabs sandwich and eats it*[br]

Shifty: ... I was saving that. [br]

Blain: Here. *gives chocolate bar* [br]

Shifty: Oh gee, thanks sir. [br]

Blain: Don't get sarcastic with me Shifty. *pats Shifty's cheeks* [br]

Shifty: ... *eats candy bar* [br]

Blain: I'll buy you lunch when you get out. [br]

Shifty: Hehehe. [br]

Blain: Take care Shifty. [br]

Shifty: Will do sir. [br]

[br]

As I was walking through the dark corridors, I heard my own footsteps echoing. It got me thinking about all sorts of things, and if the mutiny would actually succeed without bloodshed... Already there have been a lot of lives lost for the past months... [br]

[br]

I noticed I wasn't alone at some point. It sounded like someone was running through the corridors... I bumped into Scyth as I turned a corner... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Whoa!! Dude, you scared the shoot out of me..! I've been looking for you!! [br]

Blain: Why, what's wrong? [br]

Scyth: They found out... It's been compromised... [br]

Blain: They know about it...? [br]

Scyth: *nods* [br]

Blain: frack... How'd you know...? [br]

Scyth: While I was looking for you, overheard someone talking... [br]

Blain: Anyone from us...? [br]

Scyth: Luckily no... But that doesn't change the fact we're truly fracked... [br]

Blain: How'd it happen? [br]

Scyth: I don't know, maybe someone snitched us... [br]

Blain: Damn... Now what? [br]

Scyth: I don't know, I don't know... Lemme think for a sec... [br]

Blain: What the hell are we gonna do now?! [br]

Scyth: I don't frackin' know right now!! Shut the hell up and let me think!! [br]

[br]

Well, apparently, Scyth was nervous as hell. Hell, I was too... He looked around and sighed a lot... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Alright, alright, I got it... Follow me. [br]

Blain: What are you up to? [br]

[br]

All of a sudden, he had a determined look on his face. He walked through the corridors with a quick and a determined pace, as I could feel the tension growing with the second... I had no idea how we were gonna get through this one, but all I could do was to follow Scyth and hope he had a way out... We approached a large room where I could hear people yell and argue, and as soon as we opened the doors, everyone looked at us... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Looks like the party started without us... [br]

Echidna: That's them!! [br]

Blain: fracking... [br]

[br]

We got pushed in the middle of a crowd where everyone was there that knew of the mutiny... A really bad sign... [br]

[br]

Tavish: 'Sup guys? Lovely day to die, isn't it? [br]

Scyth: ... No... Not tonight, Tavish... [br]

Blain: What happened...? [br]

Vijay: ... Someone got scared and snitched on everyone... [br]

[br]

Then the captain walked towards us... [br]

[br]

Captain: I'll tell you a story of someone who was betrayed by those closest to him, by his own blood... They whispered in dark corners, went out late at night and conspired and conspired... But he knew they were up to something... He knew they were busy like little bees... [br]

[br]

Then he looked at us with penetrating eyes... [br]

[br]

Captain: One night he sat down with one of them and he looked at her and said, "Tell me what you've been doing... Busy little bee... Or I shall strike down those dearest to you. You shall watch as I bathe in their blood..." And what do you think happened then...? [br]

[br]

Blain: ... The little bee told him everything... [br]

Captain: Exactly... [br]

[br]

Then he turned around, pulled out his pistol and shot the one who snitched us... [br]

[br]

Captain: Tell me something... Is it fear, or stupidity that compels you...? One might say that it's actually courage, but then again, the definition of courage is to hold on to fear for just a little longer... Some might even say that it's merciful of me to make sacrifices in order for the others to survive... You see him...? You see the dead echidna...? Tell me, am I not merciful...? [br]

[br]

And we all stared at him for a moment without saying anything... Just looking at him with cold eyes... [br]

[br]

Captain: AM I NOT MERCIFUL?!!! [br]

[br]

He walked around and looked at everyone who knew of the mutiny... [br]

[br]

Scyth: This is it, Blain... [br]

[br]

The tension was unbearable as you clearly saw 2 sides forming... One who was with the captain and one who was against... Friends became enemies, enemies became allies... People who shared the same ideal pushed their differences and opinions aside to work together. Scyth looked along the row that was slowly formed and he rose up his fist. Some of them nodded and you could see

that they were alert... Their grip around their weapons tightened and I could see the other side was doing the same... [br]

[br]

At that same moment, everyone aimed their weapons at the other row, as they immediately responded by drawing their weapons as well... I guess the captain got a bit startled by that as he immediately retreats to his own group as the yelling and arguing started again... [br]

[br]

Scyth: shoot, shoot, shoot, shoot, shoot... [br]

Blain: What, what, what? [br]

Scyth: It failed again... I could have sworn it would work... [br]

Blain: What did...? [br]

Scyth: See that group in the back...? [br]

Blain: ... No...? [br]

Scyth: Over there... We'd be sitting ducks if a gun fight was gonna start... We gotta distract them somehow... [br]

[br]

Blain: Any ideas...? [br]

Scyth: ... *shakes head* Lemme think... [br]

[br]

Captain: We can still win this war!! You frackin' little pissants are opposing it!! Don't you frackin' realize what you are doing?!! [br]

[br]

Hedgehog: Do you?!! [br]

Captain: What?!! [br]

Hedgehog: I'm sick and tired of all this bullshoo!! You don't give a shoot what will happen to us!! All you ever do is-[br]

[br]

Then he got shot... This is getting way out of hand... It stayed total silence for a moment... [br]

[br]

Captain: Mutiny!! The penalty for which is death by firing squad!! You have one chance, and one chance only to save your life of the lowest form of treason to ever be committed!! [br]

[br]

Jarod: Man, frack you!! [br]

Captain: Those of you who do not wish to undo their actions are being executed!! [br]

Blain: He's frackin' delusional...[br]

[br]

Then Scyth looked at me and walked away over to the other side... [br]

[br]

Blain Scyth, what the frack are you doing...? [br]

Scyth: Sorry Blain... [br]

Blain: frackin-[br]

Scyth: Get ready... [br]

[br]

Scyth walked up to the captain... [br]

[br]

Captain: Well at least one of you still got sense... What's your name? [br]

Scyth: Scyth sir. [br]

Captain: Good... How far would you go to prove you're loyalty to me...? [br]

Scyth: I'd kill the traitorous dogs for you sir... [br]

[br]

Tavish: What the frack is he doing...?[br]

Blain: No idea... He's dead when I get out of here alive... [br]

[br]

Captain: Anyone else?!! [br]

[br]

Then a few others stepped over, following the example that Scyth laid out for them... [br]

[br]

Captain: Gooooood!! We're making progress here!! More volunteers?!! [br]

[br]

Then everyone stared at the captain with a pissed off look as one of the guys put up the finger to him... [br]

[br]

Captain: You have now been officially charged with disobedience to a direct order and mutiny against a senior officer!! The penalty for which is death by firing squad!! [br]

[br]

And at that point, Scyth quickly pulled out his pistol and pressed it firmly against the captain's head... This was something we didn't expect... Everyone immediately aimed their weapons at each other again... [br]

[br]

Captain: What the hell are you doing?!! I will not tolerate this!! [br]

Scyth: So be it...[br]

[br]

He immediately pulled the trigger as chunks of flesh and chips of bone sprayed out of the captain's head... The guys on the other side got distracted by the sudden turn of events, which bought us time to open fire. Then all hell broke loose... I kicked down a table and hid behind it. Like Scyth pointed out, Tavish, Jarod and me took out the group that had a clear shot to us, and after that, it was only a matter of firing back and try to stay alive... Maybe it lasted for 10 minutes, and it sure felt like that... One by one, you saw people getting gunned down by the second until there wasn't much left standing... Everywhere you looked, you saw a lot of casualties on both sides... I threw my weapon away and sat down in a corner... And not long after that, Scyth, Tavish and Jarod joined me as well... [br]

[br]

We didn't say anything while we were sitting there... We were all thinking of what just happened... We didn't want things to turn out like this... We tried to find a peaceful solution to get this misunderstanding out of the way. But I guess when someone who has the lead makes the wrong decisions and is determined to keep making the wrong decisions, is stubborn enough to die for his foolish ideals. But that wasn't my biggest worry...[br]

[br]

What got me was that basically, we were all on the same side... The humans were our enemy, not each other... So then again, I wondered how things could go like this. And no matter how much I thought about it, the answer never came, as with so many questions. They never got answered... And that really got me. [br]

[br]

[br]

17 - He loved me...

When I was young, it seems that life was so wonderful. I didn't thought about all the bad stuff that can happen to me, because I didn't know it yet... A long time ago, I asked myself the very same question over and over again. And I found the answer. And the answer was a hedgehog, and he got me through everything as I helped him with his struggles. We had a relationship together that only a few people have with each other while we didn't even realized it, and especially now, where love is uncommon and a rare thing to witness. Even though I don't see him anymore, smell him anymore, or touch him anymore, he never left my side. Words can not tell how much I miss him, pictures can not show how much I love him and feelings can not be expressed of how much I cared for him... [br]

[br]

I was ignorant enough not to know. But now I do, and I don't know what to think. It makes me wish that I made different choices in the past, and although there are still a lot of things I deeply regret, there's nothing I can do to undo it. The only thing I can do now is to look at the current situation and make decisions on how to carry on from that point. And after all the things we've been through now, makes me think that life is not as wonderful as I pictured it a long time ago... [br]

[br]

It wasn't my first near-death experience... No... It wasn't... Blain was there... But now he wasn't. Sometimes, when I look at Terry and see how he treats everyone else, and especially me, makes me think that a part of Blain lives on in Terry. Although they are not related to each other in any way, there are so many things I can see inside of Terry that Blain has too. It makes me wonder sometimes what it's like to be loved again, to feel the same feelings you get when you're in love. There isn't a way to describe it when you truly love someone or how to describe it if the other is feeling the same for you. It's something you have to see and feel for yourself to comprehend the feelings. For twenty three years, I felt it... And it always came unexpected... Whenever I hugged Blain, or kissed him... Taking a shower with him or slept with him... We always showed affection towards each other, even if it was a simple gesture like a hug or a kiss. With everything we did, it felt so passionate and intense. But at some point, you take it for granted, and as I learned the hard way, you don't know it's there until it's not there anymore... And that was, and still is, a very difficult thing to accept... Maybe you're thinking right now: "Why is she telling me this?" Well... Truth be told, I have no idea... But I almost died and I thought way different about things than I used to. I already knew that life is fragile and can be over in a second, but this time... I know that there isn't much love left over in this world, and all I want is a little bit affection... I wanna know what it's like to be loved again, even if it's just a tiny little bit. I'm feeling alone while I'm not, and I'm scared... I was afraid that history might repeat itself again of what I did a long time ago... And it did happen except I didn't realize it at the time... [br]

[br]

I was so tired of the struggle to fight for my life. I was soaking wet... I felt really cold... I was being carried by Terry as I slowly opened my eyes, and noticed that dawn was breaking down. Terry was carrying me with my legs in his left hand and the rest in his right as I was leaning over to his chest. I felt so tired... Every move I tried to make, exhausted me, and even the simplest things like breathing and blinking was tiresome for me... I noticed that Lattei walked on Terry's left side, carrying two. He was carrying Mahabi

and that brown hedgehog... Then I felt that someone was stroking through my hair. I turned my head with a lot of effort and noticed it was that tigress... And then I felt how my eyelids closed again... [br]

I woke up in total silence... I didn't know where I was. I saw the clear starry night sky through tiny windows that somewhat illuminated the large area. And as I looked up, I noticed all sorts of ropes with rings once my eyes were used to the darkness. It took me a while before I realized I was in a gym. The familiar green floor with all sorts of stripes that felt like rubber was seen and as I looked to my left, I noticed the others were sleeping on gym mats, and noticed I was placed on one myself... I noticed Terry was to the left of me. He was wearing different clothes... Everyone was actually, even me... I kept staring at Terry until he opened his eyes... [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... Hey... [br]

Terry: Hey Nic... How you feeling...? [br]

Nicole: I'm still feeling nauseous... And... A little woozy in my head... [br]

Terry: *nods slowly* [br]

Nicole: How about you...? [br]

Terry: Same... How's your arm doing...? [br]

[br]

Arm...? Terry looked down on my right arm and as I looked too, I noticed that it was wrapped up in a bloodstained bandage... Every time I tried to move my fingers, it hurt... [br]

[br]

Terry: It had some bullet shrapnel, which is why it's a deep long cut... It actually looks much worse than it is... I managed to get most of the fragments out... [br]

[br]

Nicole: *nods* [br]

Terry: You'll be alright Nic... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Thanks Terry... [br]

[br]

I stared at my arm for a bit. I was anxious enough to see how it looked like, but I was scared at the same time. And then I noticed my new clothes... Which got me wondering...[br]

[br]

Nicole: Terry...? [br]

Terry: Hm...? [br]

Nicole: Who eh... [br]

Terry: What? [br]

Nicole: Who got me into the dry clothes...? [br]

Terry: ... I did... [br]

Nicole: ... You've... Seen me naked...? [br]

Terry: *nods slowly*[br]

Nicole: ... [br]

Terry: ... Hey... It was either seeing you naked or to see you dieing from pneumonia... [br]

[br]

Nicole: You didn't...-[br]

Terry: ... No, of course not... It's not like I'm... some kind of a sick frack or anything... What do you take me for...? [br]

[br]

Nicole: *sighs* [br]

Terry: I mean... You barely made it... Mahabi almost died... Axel who was about to drown... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Axel...? [br]

Terry: *nods* The brown hedgehog over there. [br]

Nicole: I see... [br]

Terry: I mean... I wouldn't know what I would do without you guys... And I got a lot of things on my mind, and what you were thinking of is the least on my mind... [br]

[br]

Nicole: I'm sorry... [br]

[br]

It stayed silent for a while as I was staring outside through the roof windows... [br]

[br]

Terry: You know, Nicole...?[br]

Nicole: Hm...? [br]

Terry: When we first got out of Deberan and before we met Lattei and Mahabi, I thought this was the start of our survival, where every day we had to fight to survive... But as Lattei and Mahabi came along, I considered it more as an adventure... Maybe even considered it as some sort of roadtrip, having fun on the way and everything... But... What happened yesterday... I mean... We did great for well over a month but... I realized after last night that... You guys mean a lot more to me then I could ever imagine... And well... Seeing you and Mahabi lifelessly on the ground is... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Heh... [br]

[br]

Terry: I mean... I was scared shootless you know... [br]

Nicole: So was I... [br]

Terry: *sighs* [br]

[br]

I had the feeling Terry wanted to tell me more. I kept looking in his eyes, but I guess he didn't know how to tell it. I might have a hunch what he wanted to tell me, but his eyes said a lot. I caressed with my left hand through his spiky hair as I kept staring in his eyes. And at some point, I could hear him sobbing. I guess what happened yesterday really made an impact on the poor guy. So I cuddled him, and kept him close until the sobbing stopped... [br]

[br]

The next day, I felt something tickling my nose. As soon as I opened my eyes, I noticed Lattei dangling above me on those ropes doing all sorts of tricks... But those tails kept poking my nose... And at some point, I got so sick of it that I grabbed one of those tails... He got so startled by that, that he fell down and dangled on one leg through the ring as his face was right in front of mine... [br]

[br]

Lattei: ... Don't ever do that again... Their sensitive... [br]

Nicole: *smiles innocently*[br]

Lattei: You're lucky you're a woman... [br]

Nicole: Hehehehe... [br]

Lattei: When did you wake up?[br]

Nicole: Not too long ago, no thanks to those tails of yours... [br]

Lattei: Hm. [br]

Nicole: Hehe... [br]

Lattei: So how are you doing? Terry told me this morning you woke up again. [br]

Nicole: Yeah... Still feeling a bit funny but... I'll manage... [br]

Lattei: Good... [br]

Nicole: What about Mahabi...? How's he doing...? [br]

Lattei: Not so good I'm afraid... He got hit by something and has a deep cut on the right side of his head.

Terry says that he has a concussion...[br]

[br]

Nicole: Ooh...[br]

Lattei: Yeah... Do you know what he was hit with...? [br]

Nicole: No... I'm sorry, I don't know much of it anymore... So how's he doing now...? [br]

[br]

Lattei: Sometimes he's fully aware and... Other times he falls unconscious... Terry thinks the best thing for him is to rest a lot, and keep a close eye on him... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Yeah... How about you...? [br]

Lattei: Got a few scratches and bruises, but nothing serious... [br]

Nicole: I see... That's good to hear... [br]

Lattei: Yeah, except my leg turned numb... [br]

Nicole: ... Huh? [br]

Lattei: ... Look. [br]

[br]

Then I realized he was still dangling... I wasn't really that bright yet... He pushed himself up and reached with his left hand for the rope. It took him a few tries, but once he got hold of the rope, he lifts himself up with just one hand while his foot stands in the ring itself. Then he drops down. [br]

[br]

Lattei: Come on, let's go see the others. [br]

Nicole: Where exactly are we...? [br]

Lattei: Well, obviously, this is the gym. [br]

Nicole: ... Yes, I figured that bit. [br]

Lattei: Actually we arrived at the Farrell Tech University. [br]

Nicole: ...[br]

Lattei: Complete with dorms, so that means hot showers and warm beds. [br]

Nicole: Ah... Then why didn't we spend the night in those dorms...? [br]

Lattei: Most of them are still a mess, so we need to clean it out first... We're probably staying until Mahabi gets better. [br]

[br]

Nicole: Ah. [br]

Lattei: And the best thing is, we got the whole place for ourselves... [br]

[br]

Lattei and I walked out of the gym and walked through the large hallways. Everywhere you looked, the place was a terrible mess. It looked like everyone left the place in a hurry... After walking for a while, we reached the huge cafeteria. As soon as we opened the doors, I saw Rachel sitting at a table, eating. When she saw us, her eyes widened and she ran towards me. Rachel kept on cuddling me and told me how much she missed me. Lattei walked off towards the counter and I saw Terry behind it... [br]

[br]

Tigress: Terry, I asked for food, not some smelly blob. [br]

Terry: Stop whining already Ceylan... [br]

Ceylan: ... I think it just winked at me... [br]

Terry: Axel seems to like it.[br]

Ceylan: Yeah, but Axel is like a trashcan, everything goes down. I'll bet when they cut open his stomach they'll even find license plates. [br]

[br]

Nicole: Ceylan...? [br]

Lattei: Yeah, that's her name. [br]

Nicole: How'd she get here...? [br]

Lattei: Axel and Ceylan are the only ones that made it besides us... They were the only ones smart enough not to run over the bridge, but to take cover behind the debris. [br]

[br]

Nicole: Ooh... [br]

[br]

I looked at the tigress first. She was dark orange, with black and white patterns all over her body, and slightly smaller than Terry. She was wearing ripped jeans, sneakers and a top with long sleeves. One of the sleeves was ripped, and I could see she had muscles. She wasn't as muscular as Terry, but I think she could lift a lot of weight... Ceylan didn't really look that old... Nineteen years old, twenty maybe... Twenty three tops... She had this kind of a tender and soft expression on her face, and everything she seems to do was touched by her gentle motions and expression... She was really pretty... [br]

[br]

Terry: Yo!! Dude!! *waves arm *[br]

Nicole: Huh? [br]

Terry: Finally! [br]

Nicole: Oh! Hey!! [br]

Terry: C'mere dude!! *hugs Nicole*[br]

Nicole: Hehehe... *hugs Terry* [br]

Terry: You've slept for a whole day! [br]

Nicole: I did...? [br]

Lattei: *nods* [br]

Terry: You must be hungry, here, have some winking smelly blob. *throws some on plate* [br]

[br]

Nicole: You sure it's safe to eat it? [br]

Ceylan: Well eh, Axel is eating it and hasn't died yet, so it's safe I guess. [br]

Nicole: Hehe, I'm Nicole. [br]

Ceylan: Ceylan. Come on, let's find a place to eat our blobs. [br]

Nicole: Well, that shouldn't be too hard... [br]

Ceylan: We can always go- Heey!! Look! It's Axel! [br]

Axel: ... [br]

Ceylan: Enjoying the blob?! [br]

Axel: ... Hm. [br]

Ceylan: Axel gets shy around new people... It's ok sweetie! This... This is Nicooooooooole... Can you say that? [br]

[br]

Axel: 'Sup... [br]

Ceylan: Daaww... *hugs Axel* [br]

[br]

Axel glared at Ceylan... [br]

[br]

Nicole: So... Are you two like... Together...? [br]

Ceylan: What? Oh no! Oh ho, no, no, no, no! Nooooo... Axel saved my life once. And I stucked with him ever since. He's like my personal bodyguard. [br]

[br]

Nicole: I see. [br]

Ceylan: He's cute though! [br]

Axel: You know I can hear you right...? [br]

Ceylan: Yes... [br]

Axel: Hm...[br]

[br]

Ceylan kept on blabbering about all sorts of things while Axel just sat there and ate his blob. She was much like Terry, just as cheered up like he is. At some point, her plate was empty as mine was... Still half full... She looked over at Terry, who was talking to Lattei. [br]

[br]

Ceylan: Hmmm!! Delicious! My compliments to the chef! [br]

Terry: The chef could use a hug! [br]

Ceylan: Lattei?! [br]

Lattei: Aye?[br]

Ceylan: Hug the chef for me please! [br]

Lattei: ... I don't hug canines. [br]

Terry: Of course you doooooooo!! *hugs Lattei* [br]

Lattei: Alright, alright, enough. [br]

Ceylan: Fine, I'll hug you then. [br]

[br]

Then she got up and hugged Terry, as Rachel jumped in Lattei's arms... Then I just stared at Axel... [br]

[br]

Nicole: So eh... [br]

[br]

He looked at me for a short moment, but as soon as he noticed I stopped talking, he continued eating... [br]

[br]

Nicole: How are you? [br]

Axel: Good... [br]

Nicole: ... Good, good... [br]

Axel: *nods* [br]

Nicole: And eh... How long do you know Ceylan? [br]

Axel: Two months... [br]

Nicole: Okay... [br]

Axel: ...[br]

Nicole: ... [br]

Axel: Don't get me wrong, I do like her. She's nice. [br]

Nicole: Yeah. But...? [br]

Axel: She eh... [br]

Nicole: Hm? [br]

Axel: She's a bit of a... A... [br]

Nicole: ... Weirdo? [br]

Axel: ... Yeah. [br]

Nicole: ... Then she fits right in with us... [br]

Axel: Yeah... I mean... Just look at them... [br]

[br]

We looked over at Terry and Ceylan, who got their mouths wide open... Then Terry looked in her mouth... [br]

[br]

Terry: ... Dayuuuumn... Look at the size of those things... [br]

Ceylan: Ah tol ya mine'sh biggah than you're'ssh. [br]

Terry: Are not. [br]

Ceylan: Awe tewoo. [br]

Terry: Alright, alright, alright. *opens mouth wide open* Lattei! Who'sh got teh biggesht fang'sh?! [br]

[br]

Lattei: ... She does. [br]

Rachel: *nods* [br]

[br]

Then he moves his head next to hers, and they both stared at Lattei... [br]

[br]

Terry: Ya shure? [br]

Lattei: Yeah, pretty much. [br]

Ceylan: Tol ya... [br]

Terry: ... [br]

Ceylan: Cah Ah closhe meh mouf now? [br]

Terry: Yeah. [br]

[br]

Then I looked back at Axel, who shakes his head and sighed as he continued eating... [br]

[br]

The rest of the day was fun as far as you can call it that. Everyone was still pretty nervous about the thing that happened on the bridge two days earlier and Lattei, Terry and I were still worried about Mahabi. We checked on him every hour but you could see he was very tired whenever he was awake. He could talk, except you couldn't really make sense of what he was saying. You could see that Lattei tried not to show it, but he was really worried about his cousin and if everything was gonna be alright with him... [br]

[br]

We all picked a room to spend the night in. Ceylan spend the night alone, as Axel and Lattei had a room for themselves. It does saved a lot of cleaning out if two people shared a room, and maybe it was we were too tired to make everything tidy. Terry and I got a room together as well, and although it was still a mess, we couldn't be bothered to clean it further up. And we both got in bed. I got so used to that idea now... [br]

[br]

It stayed silent for like half an hour... [br]

[br]

Terry: ... Nicole...? [br]

Nicole: Hm...? Aren't you asleep yet...? [br]

Terry: No... [br]

Nicole: Oh... What's wrong...? [br]

Terry: Remember that story you told me a while back...? [br]

Nicole: What story...? [br]

Terry: ... About you and you're friend Jayla...? [br]

Nicole: Oh... Yeah...? [br]

Terry: ... Do you still look at girls the way guys do...? [br]

Nicole: ... No... [br]

Terry: ... [br]

Nicole: ... Well, sometimes... But... I don't really wanna talk about it... [br]

Terry: Is it because... Everything ended in a bad experience and not the way you wanted it to be...? [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... Maybe... [br]

Terry: Remember that feelings you had with her, when everything was fine...? [br]

Nicole: ... Terry, just... Drop it already, ok? Go to sleep... [br]

Terry: And what about Blain...? [br]

Nicole: ... What about him? [br]

Terry: Nothing... Never mind, it's a silly thing... [br]

[br]

Nicole; Terry, what's wrong...? Why'd you asked...? [br]

Terry: It's eh... [br]

Nicole: Hm...? [br]

Terry: Well... I've... I've been thinking last night... After you woke up... [br]

Nicole: ... About what...? [br]

Terry: It's eh... It's a bit of a stupid thing to ask but... Promise not to freak out... [br]

Nicole: ... Ok... Just... What is it...? [br]

Terry: I told you before that I like you... [br]

Nicole: Hmm-mm... [br]

Terry: And eh... [br]

Nicole: ... Go on... [br]

Terry: Well... Do you think... Do you think that... Two people can love each other while thinking of the loved ones who passed away...? [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... Whadda ya mean...? [br]

Terry: Like... Loving them in everything they do...? [br]

Nicole: ... As in "Loving them" loving them...? [br]

Terry: Yeah... Like...Pretending the other is the one who passed away...?[br]

Nicole: ... [br]

Terry: *nods* [br]

Nicole: I eh... [br]

Terry: Hm...? [br]

Nicole: I assume you mean me...? [br]

Terry: ... Yeah... [br]

Nicole: *sighs* Geez Terry, what are you asking of me...? I'm a mother... I can't do something like that... [br]

[br]

Terry: ... Even if you really wanted it...?[br]

[br]

Nicole: ... Look, Terry... I like you... But... Not the way you think it is... I mean... I'm forty one years old, and... You're like, what, twenty five...? [br]

[br]

Terry: Twenty six... ..Does age really matter...? [br]

Nicole: ... Maybe not for you, but it does for me... I just can't... [br]

[br]

Terry: ... I'm sorry Nic... I'm... I'm sorry I even thought of it... *sighs*[br]

Nicole: It's ok... Just... Go to sleep and... Let's forget we had this conversation, ok...? [br]

[br]

Terry: *nods* [br]

Nicole: Goodnight... [br]

Terry: ... Goodnight...[br]

[br]

Where did Terry come up with that idea anyway...? I still remember what happened with Rico a very long time ago... And before it happened, I felt miserable just as I am right now... Maybe I felt even more miserable now than I was then... I kept wondering why Terry liked me, even though I was 15 years older than him... I turned my back against Terry and stared at the pitch black... My eyes got used to it fairly quick and I noticed I was staring in a mirror. And of course, I saw myself... I kept wondering what it was that Terry liked about me and why he wanted to have sex with me. Well, at least, that's what I thought he meant. But the question I thought about the most was, why did he want to pretend I'm his dead girlfriend...? Why did he ask about Jayla? Feelings...? I kept staring at my own reflection in the mirror when I suddenly found the answer... [br]

[br]

Terry misses Sarudja just as much as I miss Blain... Maybe he wanted to feel what it's like to be loved again, like I do... And well... Having sex with Terry and pretending its Blain... I don't know... It's a wrong thing to do... But is it wrong to be loved by someone else...? I don't know... All sorts of thoughts ran through my mind as I still remembered what happened a long time ago. People don't love each other in this world anymore... I forgot what it's like... I almost died... Would it be a wrong thing to do...? The more I thought about it, the more sense Terry's idea would seem... [br]

[br]

At some point, my body turned around to face Terry. Everything in my mind said it was a wrong thing to do, but it was like I couldn't stop myself. I stroked my hand through his spiky hair and at some point, he opens his eyes and looked at me. I gently kissed him... He looked a little surprised at first, but then he stroked his hand through my long hair, kissing me and in my neck and everything... After a while, he took off my top as I felt his hand going down in my panties... [br]

[br]

I thought I was being used. That I was a slut or something. There is no excuse to do something like that, especially if you still have a relationship. I was wrong... Maybe it was still a wrong thing to do, but it didn't felt like that. With everything he did, it was done with so much passion, that I just closed my eyes. I felt his warm breath, the strong embracing's, and the gentle touches and kisses. For one and a half hour, I thought that Blain really was here with me... Sounds faded off as I closed my eyes, and just saw Blain... [br]

[br]

[br]

Then at some point, I opened my eyes and noticed Terry stroking through my hair as he was still on top of me... He gently kissed me again and got off of me. Then the whole thinking started again... Right, wrong...? I didn't know. All I know is that I wasn't miserable anymore. But it felt like something was missing... [br]

[br]

As I kept thinking about that, I felt Terry gently massaging my breasts as his other hand went down

again. At some point, he lifts up my leg as his head went down... So eh... Heh. It wasn't actually kissing what he did down there... Gently lapping was more like it... And... That's the only thing he did for a while... Heh... And after a while I... Well... You know... [br]

[br]
I still remember how intense everything felt, and I could feel how every muscle in my body was spanned as he did all those things. Gentle touches, kissing my legs, my paws and everything... I guess the reason why I let it happen and why I did it went deeper than just love. On the contrary, I didn't feel it was love. I don't even know why I even told you about this. But in a world where there is so much hate, so much sorrow and so many people lost their lives, you'll have to grab every opportunity... Love is something small, and can't be found with everyone, but it is so much stronger than hate. And although not many people loved each other in this world anymore, and although I only knew Terry for a month and a half, he loved me... With all his heart, he loved me... [br]

18 - Irene...

Staring outside the window for two days didn't help at all. I thought it would, but it didn't. It got me thinking about all sorts of things, and what frustrates me is that I never got an answer to a question I had, no matter how hard I thought about it. I tried to stay out of the activities Scyth was taking with everyone else to re-organize the base. I didn't want to be involved anymore, not after what happened two days ago, when the mutiny took a turn for the worst. I stayed with Amy and Sonic a lot, talking about all sorts of things that usually ended up with us crying. I kept on talking to Amy of how much I miss Nicole and if she would be alright. Amy never said anything whenever I was talking about Nicole but... She just listened...[br]

[br]

As I was staring in the mirror one morning, I thought of how much I changed over the years. It scared me. I wasn't the person anymore who I was during my time at the RRTS and I wasn't the person anymore who I was 15 years ago... That's all gone... Then the question was... Who am I now...? I never really liked humans but... I realized I hate them more then I could have ever imagined. I remember what Nicole said a long time ago, that I changed so much and that I actually "love". She always thought that love would solve every problem, even in the darkest of hours. Maybe for her, but that wasn't the case for me... She told me about the stuff that happened to her a long time ago, and even though she went through it, she still managed to love... How was that possible for her...? How come I never took over that ability...? Like with all questions... I didn't know... Always see the good in everyone... She even did that with me... With every minute that passed by as I was staring in the mirror, I realized she loved and cared for me more then anyone ever did. And I loved and cherished her more then I ever imagined... She meant a lot more to me then I ever thought... [br]

[br]

Tavish: Sergeant?![br]

[br]

I looked up in the mirror and quickly splashed my face with water. I recognized that voice. It was Tavish... [br]

[br]

Blain: 'Sup Tavish, whatcha got? [br]

Tavish: They need you up front. [br]

Blain: ... Right, I'll be there in a sec. [br]

[br]

After I was done in my room, I went over to the briefing room. I heard a lot of people talking and as I entered the room, I saw a lot of people... Even a few I haven't seen before... Then I noticed Scyth... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Alright, he's here, we're all here, right?[br]

Regan: Yeah, looks like it. [br]

Scyth: Ok good, inform everyone. [br]

Regan: Alright listen up!! [br]

[br]

Then it turned total silence... [br]

[br]

Regan: Last night, 6 pilots of the Mobian National Airforce Division arrived. They'll be you're pilots this evening for the mission. [br]

[br]

Mission...?[br]

[br]

Regan: Vilani, brief us in, please. [br]

Vilani: Yes sir. [br]

[br]

Then a leopard stepped forward... The sound of her voice gave away that she was a girl, because you couldn't really see it. She was all packed up and she had her helmet on. [br]

[br]

Vilani: Few hours before our arrival, five gunships were gunned down near a small village called Redmondville. On the way, we've seen a prison camp and a supply depot. After discussing the tactical plans with sergeant Regan, we'll be out tonight at nineteen hundred hours to secure the crash site and extract any survivors. We've got live satellite images and a UAV at our disposal to look for enemy activity. We're not taking any risks, and as soon as we notice we can not commence the attack, the operation will be aborted. Codename to this operation: Irene. [br]

[br]

Jarod: **whispers** Irene...? What kind of a shooty name is that for an operation...? Why not just call it Operation "Suck my big fluffy cock"...?[br]

[br]

Tavish: Hehehehehe... [br]

Vilani: 'Scuse me, private, you wanna add something?! [br]

[br]

Then Jarod turned red... [br]

[br]

Jarod: No ma'am.[br]

Vilani: Good... Get you're gear, and go the gunship platforms. Re-group with you're squad and board the designated gunship. We'll let you know when it's truly a go. [br]

[br]

So we did what she told us to do. I could see the stripes of her uniform that she was a lieutenant. Normally, Regan and I had superior ranks, but seeing as she was leading this operation with the gunships, we had to listen to her. Luckily, she didn't make decisions on her own, unlike the captain, whose dead now... [br]

[br]

Once I got my weapons and gear, we boarded a gunship as instructed. It was a huge gunship with room for around 10 soldiers to carry along. Tavish and Jarod boarded the same gunship I was in, but I didn't see Regan or Scyth. They were probably somewhere else. I noticed that there were five other gunships were on the platform, ranging in size. Also, not every gunship seemed to be that heavily armed. All of them had board-cannons, sure, but not every gunship were the same. It looked like different types... [br]

[br]

I kicked back in the open door, tightened my helmet and calibrated the small transparent HUD in

front of my right eye. HUD stands for Heads Up Display, by the way. It gives tactical information on the battlefield and can be a life saver as it shows known enemies that others have spotted. It's all acquired by the squad's Net-Bat system that allows us to share information based on what we see. Also, radio and the headset were integrated, allowing you to communicate with others if you got the right frequency. I was messing around with it for a while until I was startled by the loud noises the jet engines made... It started up... [br]

[br]

Vilani: *kssht* Good evening gentlemen! My name is lieutenant Vilani of the 563rd Airforce Division! I'll be you're pilot this evening! The guy sitting next to me Keaton! He's the co-pilot and makes sure we're not getting gunned down! Currently, we are waiting for the all go signal from COMScann! Stand-by to move, over! *kssht* [br]

[br]

Jarod: Lieutenant Vilani, ma'am?! [br]

Vilani: *kssht* Yes private?! *kssht* [br]

Jarod: Where the hell are my in-flight peanuts?! [br]

Vilani: *kssht* Check under you're seat! I'm sure there's still a barf-bag that has a few chunks left, over! *kssht* [br]

[br]

Jarod: *laughs* She's amazing! I love her already! [br]

Vilani: *kssht* Didn't copy that, private! *kssht* [br]

Jarod: I said I can't wait to kick some human asses, ma'am! [br]

Vilani: *kssht* Haha! Ten/four! *kssht* [br]

[br]

A few minutes passed by with a few guys arsing around. I didn't. I just kept on looking at the other gunships. I noticed Scyth and Regan not too far from our gunship... [br]

[br]

Vilani: *kssht* Irene is a go! Irene is a go!! *kssht* [br]

Tavish: Whoooooo!! frackin' Irene!! [br]

[br]

And with that, the large doors of hangar opened up above, and one by one, we took off. As I looked down through the open doors, I noticed flightdeck crew signalling with coloured flashlights. They slowly faded away to tiny little dots as we got higher... [br]

[br]

The guys were still talking after half an hour. I didn't. All I did was to look outside... I did noticed that Lieutenant Vilani kept looking over her shoulder every once in a while. At some point, I looked at her. She smiled at me... [br]

[br]

Vilani: *kssht* You must be Sergeant Blain. *kssht* [br]

Blain: Yes I am. [br]

Vilani: *kssht* Nice to meet you, sir. *kssht* [br]

Blain: Likewise. [br]

Vilani: *kssht* Sergeant Regan told a lot about you. Any friend of him is a friend of mine. *kssht* [br]

[br]

Blain: Hehehe, why is that? [br]

Vilani: *Kssht* Because, he's my cousin. *kssht* [br]

Jarod: Lucky bastard... [br]

Blain: Hehehehe... [br]

Jarod: You didn't do anything to impress her and you're her friend all of a sudden... [br]

[br]

Vilani: *kssht* What was that, private?!* [br]

Jarod: The private has a name. lieutenant! [br]

Vilani: *kssht* Oh yeah?! And what name may that be, private?! *kssht* [br]

Jarod: Private Jarod ma'am! [br]

Vilani: *kssht* I see! I guess that makes you my new best friend! *kssht* [br]

Jarod: Rawr!! Haha! [br]

Vilani: *kssht* You cheeky little bugger! *kssht* [br]

Jarod: Well since we're being best friends now, how about we're getting married instead?![br]

Vilani: *kssht* With a pussy like you?! *kssht* [br]

Jarod: Whadda ya mean pussy?![br]

Vilani: *kssht* You're a cat, right?! *kssht* [br]

Jarod: Yes ma'am! An exotic domestic Ashera cat to be exact, Lieutenant! [br]

[br]

Vilani: *kssht* Ooh, aren't you special! *kssht* [br]

Jarod: Yes ma'am! [br]

Vilani: *laughs* [br]

[br]

As another half hour passed by, I noticed that Tavish was unusually quiet... It wasn't like him to be so quiet... [br]

[br]

Blain: 'Sup Tavish, you nervous? [br]

Tavish: Gaah... No... [br]

Blain: What's wrong then...? [br]

Tavish: I don't- I don't feel so good... [br]

Jarod: You're airsick?! How the hell can you get airsick?![br]

Tavish: I don't know... [br]

Blain: You need to barf? [br]

Tavish: I'll be alright... [br]

Jarod: Remember that time we got locked on? The gunship did a lot of corkscrews, somersaults, twists and- [br]

[br]

Tavish: *hurls* [br]

Jarod: Oh dude, that's just nasty. Keep it in will ya? Anyway, where was I? Oh yeah, corkscrews- [br]

[br]

Then all of a sudden, Tavish smacked Jarod's helmet off and barfed in it... Jarod looked at Tavish who had an innocent smile on his face as he pressed Jarod's helmet in his hands while we just laughed. Jarod was all pissed off and pressed his helmet back in Tavish' hands while he grabbed Tavish' helmet. [br]

[br]

And another half hour passed by... Since everyone was quiet, I could hear Vilani and her co-pilot talking... It sounded like they were worrying about something... [br]

[br]

Vilani: Something's not right.[br]

Keaton: Yeah I know, its way too quiet around here. We should have seen enemy activity a while back now.[br]

[br]

Vilani: Yeah... [br]

Keaton: Want me to contact COMScann? [br]

Vilani: Yeah, you do that. I'll run a system check. [br]

[br]

Keaton: Copy. COMScann, this is Outlaw 2-5-niner, do you read, over? [br]

[br]

Radio: Outlaw 2-5-niner, we read you, go ahead. [br]

Keaton: Requesting UAV support on our location. Map grid 12756-niner, over. [br]

Radio: Roger that, Outlaw 2-5-niner, UAV is up and running. [br]

Keaton: UAV data is being patched through. [br]

Radio: Copy. UAV coming down in 3... 2... 1... Transmission cut. [br]

Keaton: Thanks for the heads-up COMScann. Outlaw-2-5-niner out. [br]

[br]

Vilani: You got a visual on the terrain?[br]

Keaton: No, not really... Data isn't very clear... It's a bit blurry, like it's being jammed by something. [br]

[br]

Radio: All call signs, this is COMScann, be advised. We're seeing enemy armour in the palm grove west of the river, escorted by two infantry battalions. Their causing interference to your communication devices, over. [br]

[br]

Keaton: Copy that, COMScann. Any alternative routes? [br]

Radio: That's a negative, Outlaw 2-5-niner. UAV data shows out that their closing in fast. An alternative route is not possible at this moment, over. [br]

[br]

Keaton: ... Copy that COMScann... [br]

Vilani: shoot, shoot, shoot... Warn the other gunships and tell them to fly in a V formation. We're going in low. [br]

[br]

Keaton: Wilco. [br]

[br]

Vilani: Gentlemen, may I have you're attention please! We got a little problem here! UAV data shows out enemy armour closing in the palm grove, west of the river! Mop up any troublemaker with the Mark 19! [br]

[br]

Jarod took immediate action and took place behind the grenade launcher. Some other guy took the other grenade launcher on the other side and they loaded it. [br]

[br]

Jarod: Portside! Gun ready! [br]

Echidna: Starboard side! Mark 19 ready! [br]

[br]

Vilani: Listen up. UAV showed out enemy activity a few clicks from here, guys. We're going in low, so expect enemy fire. Try not to be heroes here, alright? We just wanna make it back in one piece. [br]

[br]

Blain: Will do, lieutenant. [br]

Tavish: "Whaye we ar bein' sind onh this mission... We do not know... Buh Ah do know... The faif-O-six... Will rise aginh..."[br]

[br]

Blain: Hoo-ah... [br]

Jarod: Yeah, Hoo-ah to that, college boy!! You might wanna consider speech therapy!! [br]

Tavish: Shut the hell up! And gimme my frackin' helmet back!! [br]

Jarod: Hell no!! [br]

Tavish: You're a port gunner!! You don't need a helmet!! [br]

Jarod: Well I sure don't need a helmet that got your puke in it!!

[br]

[br]

[br]

Vilani: Portside gunner, heads up, first tank rolling through!! [br]

Jarod: Yeah, I see him, lieutenant!! [br]

[br]

Radio: Outlaw 2-1-niner, at your six. [br]

Radio: Outlaw 2-3-niner, I got yo' back. [br]

Radio: Outlaw 2-2-niner, at your service. [br]

Radio: Outlaw 2-0-niner, joining the party. [br]

Radio: Outlaw 2-6-niner, whoo! Wouldn't miss this![br]

[br]

Vilani: We're going in low, stay in formation.[br]

[br]

Then all of a sudden, Vilani made the gunship drop until we got very low to the ground. We were flying just above tree top height and made our way to the river, flying just above it. I saw a tank going over the hills, and once we flew above, I noticed a lot more tanks... And that's when I became scared shootless... Not because there were so many tanks, but because Tavish was hurling again... I tightened the straps of my helmet and held on to it...[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

19 - Preventing the biggest mistake...

That same evening I woke up. I wanted to clear my mind by taking a walk through the building. As I was walking, not a single thought ran through my mind, which was just what I needed. At some point, I reached the swimming pool and sat down on the edge. I let my paws down in the water and gently moved it around a bit. The water was just right... But then the whole thinking started again... I didn't know what to think. And at some point, I heard footsteps behind me. I turned my head and saw a big posture of someone... I was startled for a bit...

Ceylan: Hey...! Hey...! Hey...! It's me, Ceylan...!

Nicole: Oh... Hey... How'd you find me...?

Ceylan: I was gonna go for a snack, but then I noticed you... What are you doing here all by yourself...?

Nicole: *sighs*

Ceylan: Hm...?

Nicole: I don't know what I'm doing right now, Ceylan...

Ceylan: Oh... Need some company...?

Nicole: If you don't mind...

Ceylan: No, of course not...

So she sat down next to me, and let her paws down in the water as well... Her paws were big... Just like her hands...

Ceylan: So what's up...?

Nicole: I eh...

Ceylan: Hm...?

Nicole: I got issues Ceylan... Like... A lot...

Ceylan: Well, who hasn't...?

Nicole: I know but... Everyone else seems to deal with it... So... Why can't I...?

Ceylan: Well, everyone got their own... "way" of dealing with their problems...

Then she looked at me with a frown...

Nicole: ... You heard it.....?

Ceylan: ... How could I not hear it...?

I let my head down and closed my eyes...

Ceylan: ... Not that there's anything wrong with it but... I'm not in charge of you're decisions...

Nicole: *sighs* I wish you were...

Ceylan: Is that what's bothering you...?

Nicole: *nods*

Ceylan: ... Well... Did you like it...?

Nicole: ... *nods*

Ceylan: Then what's the problem...?

Nicole: Because... It's a wrong thing to do, you know... I mean... Look at me...

Ceylan: ... Yeah, so...?

Nicole: *sighs*

Ceylan: What...? I don't really see the problem...

Nicole: It's because I'm a mother Ceylan...

Ceylan: Oh... Where's your kid now...?

Nicole: She died... A-a long time ago...

Ceylan: Ooh... I'm sorry...

Nicole: Don't be... At least she's not experiencing what's happening outside... I'm glad she doesn't...

Ceylan: *nods*

Nicole: *sighs*

Ceylan: What about her father...?

Nicole: ... He was one of the first victims out there...

Ceylan: ...

Nicole: *sighs*

Ceylan: I'm sorry... I don't really know what to say...

Nicole: It's alright...

Ceylan: Heh... So... You're having a hard time with it...?

Nicole: *nods* Yeah... Very hard... Blain was the kind of guy that could make every problem go away, you know... Just like that, as if it just vanished into thin air... He was like a remedy for my issues...

Ceylan: Sounds like you really loved him...

Nicole: *nods*

Ceylan: But that doesn't make the problem go away...

Nicole: *shakes no*

Ceylan: Hm?

Nicole: That's the exact problem...

Ceylan: Of what?

Nicole: The problem is that I don't think it's a problem at all while I should...

Ceylan: ... I'm confused...

Nicole: I mean... I liked it... But I shouldn't have...

Ceylan: Aah... I know what you mean... Kinda like eating cake while on a diet...

Nicole: ... Yeah... Something like that... Although there's a huge difference...

Ceylan: Yeah, the cake doesn't get pregnant by the whipped cream...

Nicole: ...

Ceylan: I'm sorry... I eh... I don't really know what to say, I'm trying to make the atmosphere here less serious... Heh...

Nicole: It's ok...

Ceylan: *sighs* I'm sorry I'm not much of a help though... I mean... I never really had a boyfriend and all that jazz... Let alone the "Pop the cherry" thing...

Nicole: Heh... Can I ask you something?

Ceylan: Sure, what's up?

Nicole: What did you do before everything was a complete mess out there...?

Ceylan: I went to college.

Nicole: Oh?

Ceylan: Until one day, college blew up. Luckily, I wasn't anywhere near... And... Ever since that, I'm

wandering around... And eventually met Axel.

Nicole: What about you're parents...? Do they know you're here...?

Ceylan: Naah... I'm an orphan...

Nicole: Ooh... So... How old are you, if you don't mind me asking...?

Ceylan: Twenty... How about you...?

Nicole: Hehe... I'm forty one...

Ceylan: ... You are?

Nicole: Yup...

Ceylan: ... You're looking really good for you're age...

Nicole: Thank you...

Ceylan: What's you're secret?

Nicole: ... Getting plenty of rest at night and... Eat a lot of vegetables?

Ceylan: Vegetables??

Nicole: ... Yeah...?

Ceylan: ... Ew...

Nicole: *smiles*

It stayed silent for a moment...

Nicole: Ceylan...?

Ceylan: Yes...?

Nicole: ... Can I stay with you tonight...?

Ceylan: Why is that...?

Nicole: Well... I eh... I need some time away from Terry... If you know what I mean...

Ceylan: Oh... Yeah, of course... You can stay... If you don't mind sharing a bed though...

Nicole: *smiles* I don't...

See, there it goes again. Making the same mistake again... Whether I'm too naïve, or too desperate, I don't know. But I do know that I keep making mistakes over and over again. I'm not making the same mistake, but I'm making new ones... Maybe the effect of the mistake wasn't visible right now, but at some point, I will regret it. Like every other choices and mistakes I made...

On the way to her room, it stayed quiet... I guess we were both very tired...

Nicole: Can I take a shower somewhere...?

Ceylan: Well, the girl's locker room...

Nicole: Don't you have a shower?

Ceylan: Yeah but it doesn't work... I got towels for you...

And after she handed me some towels, I went to the girl's locker room to take a shower. But... Truth be told, somewhere deep inside of me, I was hoping she would come along for some reason. Maybe because I was afraid to be alone or maybe it was for other reasons as well... I'm an emotional wreck, not knowing what the hell to do...

Taking a shower didn't really help. I was scared. I didn't want to be alone... I thought that the same

would happen with Rico and that Terry thought way different of me now. That I can't face him anymore. I don't want to mess things up like I did a long time ago, and yet I can see everything happening again... What am I supposed to do...?

Taking a shower alone in such a large room really frightened me... I didn't know why I became so afraid all of a sudden, but I wanted to get out... The feeling started when I entered the room, and got worse by the second... I took a really quick shower and didn't even dry myself. I quickly got dressed and got out of the room and as I was walking back towards Ceylan's room, I could hear screams and gunfire... I know it was all in my head, but the longer it lasted, the more real it became to me... And I started seeing things in poorly illuminated corridors... I picked up the pace and walked faster towards her room, as I could hear it getting louder... It felt like I was being stared at by hundreds of people, and while my mind told me to move on, I stopped and looked around... It felt like the air was getting thick and that I couldn't breathe... The things I started seeing were terrifying... Like the shadows had a life of its own... They move from corner to corner and whisper at each other in the dark... At some point, I ran through the corridors as fast as I could, while I was petrified... And when I finally reached Ceylan's room, her door was wide open and as soon as I got in, I closed the door and leaned against it... It took me a while to recover...

Ceylan: Back so soon...?

Nicole: *nods*

Ceylan: What's wrong...? You look like you've seen a ghost...

Nicole: *pants* No, it's nothing...

Ceylan: You sure...?

Nicole: *pants* Y-yeah...

After standing like that for a while, I just collapsed while I cried my eyes out... I didn't know why, but I just had to. And all this time, Ceylan was looking at me. She got up and carried me towards her bed and placed me down on it. Then she sat on the edge...

Ceylan: What's wrong with you Nicole...?

Nicole: *sobs* I don't know Ceylan... I really don't...

Ceylan: Hey... It's ok...

She stroked her hand through my hair. It was all a bit awkward, because normally, an older person would comfort a younger one... But not in this case... She cuddled me as her hand still went through my hair and my head was leaning on her shoulder... It felt so comforting and familiar that I fell asleep after a while...

I woke up yet again that very same night... I felt much better now... I looked outside the window and saw the sun was coming up. The clouds were dark orange and gold, and the sky was light blue... It was still fairly dark, but everywhere the sun touches, it turned light blue. It was an amazing view on this cold autumn day... I was captivated by it...

Slowly, the sky turned light blue as darkness disappeared. I turned over on my side, and noticed Ceylan lying next to me, with her face towards me, asleep... I never had the guts to cuddle her, but I did now... So I cuddled her... She felt so warm and soft and as I gently took her hand and placed it in mine, it felt so familiar... I stroked her long brown hair as I kept on cuddling her... I took a good look at her face and realized how beautiful she was... It reminded me of Jayla who I was in love with a long time ago... And

then I gently kissed her lips... At first, I was scared but... She didn't wake up... I scratched her behind her ear as I cuddled her again and not long after that, I fell asleep again... What one doesn't know, doesn't hurt, right...?

The next day, I was feeling miserable... I noticed that Terry wasn't perky like he always is, and that I had a hard time looking at him. I haven't said much that same day, and although I noticed Terry looked at me every once in a while, I didn't say anything to him. As evening fell again and everyone was asleep, I was thinking about everything. Maybe it was best for me and everyone else that I left. I wouldn't live long on my own, and maybe that's the reason I wanted to leave. For more than a month, the idea of me wanting to die became stronger, but that night... I finally tied the knot... I'm not committing suicide... But... There are other ways to accomplish it... So not long after that, I got up and grabbed my things...

Before I left, I went to Mahabi who was in a room alone. I wanted to see how he was doing... He still had a bloodstained bandage on his head, but he looked much better than 2 days ago... I stroked my hand through his black hair...

Nicole: Take care, Mahabi..... And... Good luck..... I wish you all the best.....

As soon as I turned around to walk away, I felt he grabbed my hand. I was startled for a short moment, but when I turned around, he slowly opened his eyes...

Mahabi: Where ya going, Nic.....? It sounded like a farewell.....

Nicole: I have to go, Mahabi..... I can't- I can't stay here.....

Mahabi: Why not.....?

Nicole: *sighs* I eh...

Mahabi: What happened, Nicole.....?

Nicole: Something... Something happened between Terry and me and... Ceylan...

Mahabi: ...Who...?

Nicole: New girl...

Mahabi: Aah...

Nicole: ... Mahabi...?

Mahabi: Yeah?

Nicole: Can I ask you something...?

Mahabi: ... Sure.....

Nicole: Is it... Is it a strange thing to... To long for your own death...?

Mahabi: ... Why is that...?

Nicole: *sighs* Never mind...

Mahabi: So that's it then...?

Nicole: *nods* Bottom line is... I think it's best for everyone that I go...

Mahabi: ... Hm. I wont stop you then. Good luck.

I looked at him and he shook his head. He stared in my eyes with a cold look and that point; I realized I had to go... So I left... But as soon as I got to the door...

Mahabi: It's about you're boyfriend, isn't it...?

As soon as he said that, I stopped...

Nicole: *nods slowly*

Mahabi: And you want to die because of him, don't you.....?

I closed my eyes and sighed... It was like he was a psychic or something but... He was right...

Mahabi: I don't have to know what happened with Terry or that... Ceylan girl but... I do know that if you walk away now, you're the weakest link... In that case, I won't stop you from going... But you're not the weakest link... No one is... Neither is Terry, Lattei, Rachel, Ceylan girl, or whoever the hell joined us. IF you leave right now, not having the guts to speak up to whoever it is you messed up with, proves that you are weak...

Nicole: *sighs*

Mahabi: And you're not weak... I heard what Terry said about what happened to you... I know you lost your daughter a long time ago... Maybe it seems like we don't give a shit about each other, Nicole, but we actually do. Just as much as you care for everyone else...

Nicole: But it's so hard, Mahabi...

Mahabi: I know... Things aren't being made easier... But remember... Death isn't a punishment... It's liberation... I think your boyfriend deserved it to be free after all the things you told me about him... And you... Don't worry... Your time will come... You'll see... But not right now... Not like this... One day, you'll be taken away from this world so that you don't have sorrow and grieve anymore... That's what I cling on to... That's what keeps me going... I know I made it sound positive, but... Be honest with me... What do we have to lose...?

Deep down inside of me, I know he was right... It got me thinking about all the stuff that Blain went through his entire life and that right now, he was waiting for me somewhere. It sounds really corny, but Mahabi made me believe that... I turned around and sat on his bed... It stayed silent for a very long time...

Mahabi: You know, Nicole... Sometimes... In times of war... We forget the simple things. We're... We're too busy with fighting and trying to stay alive that we forget what it really is to be alive...

Nicole: ... Yeah...

Mahabi: To breathe air... To feel the wind on your face or the feeling when you touch water... I realized how lucky we actually are Nicole... And we do nothing with it...

Then he looked at me again, stared for a moment and stared outside the roof window to the dark blue sky...

Mahabi: Scientists are analyzing the stars, calculated their movements and mapped out the constellations for thousands of years... But they never realized how beautiful they really are by just looking at them... When I look up to them now, it's like I'm seeing them for the very first time... And that's something no one can take away from me ever again...

We sat there for a long time... We didn't say anything, and to be honest, I didn't really know what to say... The dark blue heaven slowly turned pitch black while we could see more and more stars... One by one, they slowly came out of there slumber and illuminated the pitch black sky...

I was captivated by the sight... It was really beautiful to see it, even though it's not the first time I've seen the stars... At some point, I looked to my right and saw Mahabi fell asleep... Then I just sat back and looked all the way up, gazing at the stars... For some reason, I thought about what Mahabi said and I felt ashamed to realize that... I too, was seeing the stars for the very first time... And I was really grateful to Mahabi... Not because he prevented me from making the biggest mistake of my life, but for the opportunity to open my eyes...And I couldn't resist but to smile...

20 - Turn the tide

Once we saw the tanks rolling in, the gunships scattered around. We flew in low while we bombarded them. I guess the humans were on their way to the city when we caught them by surprise. Maybe they were going to investigate the wrecks of the gunships and take prisoners or even kill them. The tanks were blown to smithereens as Vilani did her best not to be gunned down. And well, the co-pilot kept track of what was happening as he tried to blow up as many as possible while the other gunships did the same. The infantry down below however, dropped back in the city. Once the area was clear, we headed towards the city...

Vilani: All call-signs, this is Outlaw Two-Five-niner, enemy infantry are making a run for it! We are clear to land, out!

Radio: Roger that, Outlaw 2-5-niner, we're going in. Lock and load. *kssht*

Vilani: Moment of truth guys! I'm patching the mission briefing through!

Then not long after that, all sorts of data were seen in my HUD. It was a search and extraction mission, mostly survivors of the crashes, but there was one VIP that needed to be kept alive at all costs. As I cycled through the data, I noticed this VIP was a human, going by the name of "Nigel Jones"... There was a picture of him to identify, but more information on him was classified...

Blain: Lieutenant?!

Vilani: Yes sir?!

Blain: Can you tell us why this human needs extraction?!

Vilani: I'm sorry, sergeant, I can't tell anything until further notice!!

Blain: ... Right...

Not long after that, we landed on the outskirts of the city, where enemy soldiers were roaming and looking for the wrecks. The doors opened up...

Vilani: You are no longer my responsibility, guys!! I'll leave you in the care of the sergeant!

Blain: Go!! Go!! Down the ramp!! Time to move!!

Vilani: The gunships have to retreat now, sergeant! I wish you the best of luck!

Blain: Thank you lieutenant! Be careful on the way back!

Vilani: Will do sergeant! Good luck!!

At that point, the last guy got out of the gunship. After he got out and ran away towards a building where the others were waiting for me, I got out as well. Vilani looked at me and had a little smile on her face. All I did was looking at her, not realizing I had a smile on my face as well...

The moment I got out of the gunship and touched the ground, the doors of the gunship closed.

Then it took off... The sounds of the gunship faded away slowly as I could see in the distance more gunships taking off... And then it was total silence... I walked towards the others as I cycled through my data of the HUD...

Blain: Nigel Jones...

Jarod: Who...?

Blain: He's the VIP we need to extract... I don't know the exact location while this place is crawling with enemy soldiers... Something tells me that he is wanted by both factions...

Tavish: Why...?

Blain: *sighs* I don't know. We're gonna find out soon enough if he isn't dead already...

Then I noticed the others were looking at us... I didn't know these guys...

Blain: ... Who the hell are these guys again...?

Jarod: ... F.N.G's sir...

Ah yeah... F.N.G's... “fracking New Guys”... Then I got the signal of Bravo-3, aka Regan's squad, that they found the first crash site. After that, we headed out...

The HUD guided us to the first crash site. Somewhere in the distance, we could hear gunfire every now and then, and some of the guys were scared. At some point, we reached a town's square but took cover in an ally. I held up my fist as soon as I heard talking... I peeked around the corner... And I noticed a few humans standing near the wreck and one was down on his knees with his hands on his head... At that point, my radio went static...

???: Is this a secured frequency...?

I recognized that voice... It was Scyth... I looked at the others and isolated my frequency...

Blain: It is now, go ahead, Scyth...

Scyth: I can see you on the towns square, near the wreck. Can you see me?

Blain: No...

Scyth: Look up to south-west building.

So I looked behind me. I noticed a flashing laser sight going on and off...

Scyth: Yeah that's me. Do you have a good visual on the towns square...?

Blain: Yes...

Scyth: Ok good... Uh... You see the guy with the very short spiky hair...?

Blain: Yeah... I see him...

Scyth: That's Zakhaev...

Blain: That's Zakhaev...?

Scyth: Yeah. He's a very dangerous guy, so don't mess around with him... We need to get him alive...

Blain: Why...?

Scyth: He has contacts that can be useful to us... Once we have a name, all we have to do is to track

them down... Or the "Track 'em and whack 'em" method as I like to call it... And that's it...

Blain: Yeah...

Scyth: The guy on his knees is the VIP... You gotta get the VIP out of there before he gets carried away or is being executed on the spot... Make sure Zakhaev doesn't escape... I'll cover you from the rooftops...

Blain: Got it...

Scyth: Take a deep breathe, Blain... I got my aim... Go when ready...

Blain: Copy...

Jarod: What's up sarge...?

Blain: Hold up right here, stay in cover...

I took a peek around the corner again, and noticed that Zakhaev held a gun towards the head of the VIP... At that point, I heard an ear deafening sound of a sniper rifle and I noticed Zakhaev falling down...

Then we ran onto the towns square, taking cover behind walls and buildings. We took out the few humans that were standing near Zakhaev... It all happened in a blink of an eye...

Blain: Clear down!!

Scyth: Copy, on my way.

I took a good look at Zakhaev and the human who was on his knees... The human on his knees had a deep cut on his face... Zakhaev was looking pissed at us but didn't say anything as I kicked his weapon out of his hands and got all of his other weapons such as a knife and a pistol... He was hit in the leg, and you can tell he had a lot of pain... Not long after that, Scyth arrived... Zakhaev was really shocked to see him, so the stories Scyth told about him and Zakhaev were true... In the mean time, we looked if anyone survived the crash... None... They were all dead except for that human...

Blain: Nigel Jones?!

Well the human on his knees was scared shootless... Of course he was, especially how he saw his own kind being shot to pieces. He looked at me while he was scared but didn't say anything. Then I raided his pockets and looked for ID while the others kept a close eye on the surroundings as Scyth was keeping an eye on Zakhaev...

Blain: Right... You're coming with us. All call-signs, this Bravo-six, VIP secured and waiting for extraction, over.

Radio: Copy that, Bravo-Six, Outlaw 2-3-niner inbound, over.

Then not long after that, a gunship came along. Two guys got in the gunship along with the VIP. But as soon as I wanted Zakhaev on board...

Scyth: No, not yet... Zakhaev and I need to catch up for old time's sake...

Scyth grinned at Zakhaev as he looked scared shootless... I gestured to the pilot that he could take off... So it took off...

Radio: Bravo Six, this is Bravo-three! We're taking heavy fire on our position north of the overpass! Where the hell are you?!

Scyth: Back those guys up!! I'll keep an eye on Zakhaev and meet up with you later!!

So we ran off...

Meanwhile...

Scyth noticed Zakhaev's expression. He walked around Zakhaev in circles...

Scyth: Good evening, Zakhaev...

Zakhaev: You...

Scyth: Yes... Me... Me, me, me...

Zakhaev: For decades I've been looking for you, you know...?

Scyth: Yes, and now I found you... Isn't that ironic...?

Zakhaev: Depends how you look at things...

Scyth: You mind...? *grabs pack of cigarettes from his pocket*

Zakhaev: You're wasting your time... I won't say anything...

Scyth: I'm not expecting you to say anything. The only thing I ever wanted...

Scyth grabbed his pistol and pressed it firmly against Zakhaev's head...

Scyth: Is for you to die...

Zakhaev: ... Go ahead... End it...

Scyth: I'm afraid I can't do that. Because you see, I have a little problem, and the only way to solve it is with your help. *lights up cigarette*

Zakhaev: *laughs* Ha!! Me?! Helping you?!

Scyth: ... Yes...

Zakhaev: ... Why...?

Scyth: If I recall... You're in direct contact with G.U.N and Miller... Correct...? *takes puff*

Zakhaev: ...

Scyth: Hmm... Miller admits you're a failure... Couldn't even catch a simple furrie... I know you want Miller dead as well... *blows smoke in Zakhaev's face*

Zakhaev: ... Hm...

Scyth: Then think about it...

Zakhaev: ...

Scyth: Who's going to replace Miller after he is out of the way...? Hmm...? People look up to you... You got lots of combat experience, reputation; you know what its like, don't you...? Miller doesn't have

shoot... People don't trust him any more...

Zakhaev: ... I'm listening...

Scyth: Good... So what I'm asking is... Deliver Miller alive to us... You walk away... We kill Miller... We pretend like nothing ever happened... That Miller just vanished, into thin air... And you'd be the commander of the G.U.N legions... And after our little truce is over, we can try to blow each others brains out again...

Zakhaev: ... Why should I trust you...?

Scyth: ... Because that'll be the only way to stop me...

Zakhaev: ...

Scyth: ... What's it gonna be, pretty boy...?

Zakhaev: You have a contract to take Miller out, don't you...? Someone sent you...

Scyth: I took the job for sentimental reasons... And it's because I'm sick and tired of Miller sending you're @\$ to get rid of me... And besides, I need you to accomplish it...

Zakhaev: ... I want sixty percent of you're hit fee...

Scyth: You're negotiating with me...?

Zakhaev: *nods*

Scyth: ... I didn't know if you realized it, but you're not in a position to negotiate with me...

Zakhaev: Sixty... Or I'm not doing it...

Scyth: Then I guess there's not much use in letting you live then... *presses gun against Zakhaev's head*

Zakhaev: ... Then I guess Miller isn't giving up on you...

Scyth: ...

Zakhaev: ...

Scyth: *removes gun from Zakhaev's head* Thirty percent...

Zakhaev: Fifty...

Scyth: ... Forty...

Zakhaev: Forty five...

Scyth: ... Deal...

Zakhaev: ... How do I contact you...?

Scyth: Take this radio... It's a secured frequency... Let me know when you're ready...

Zakhaev: ... Deal.

Scyth: No, no, no. You THINK we have a deal... If you frack me, I'll hire someone to settle the score with you... But I know you won't double cross me, because I know you're not stupid, Zakhaev...

Zakhaev: You're pretty persuasive for a furrie, you know that...?

Scyth: Don't get too excited Zakhaev... It might be you're demise one day... But for now, we're cool... Right...?

Zakhaev: Yeah... We're cool... For now...

Scyth passed his cigarette over to Zakhaev. Zakhaev looked at him and gave a weak smile. As soon as he wanted to grab the cigarette, Scyth dropped it and grinned at Zakhaev... Then he slowly put out the cigarette with his boot and walked away...

Radio: The 607th tank division is backing us up near the overpass!

Blain: How many of them?!

Radio: Two units in total sir! One of them is stuck in the river bog!

Blain: What's the call-sign of the tank?!

Radio: Call-sign is "War pig" sir!

Blain: Copy, Bravo-six is inbound! Tell "War Pig" to standby. We're almost there! Out!

Jarod: "War pig"?! Their not really creative when it comes to naming things, sir!

Blain: Shut the hell up and keep on running!

Then we heard a shot... And one of the guys was killed...

Jarod: Ambush!!

Tavish: Contact right!! Head's up!!

Blain: Get some suppressive fire on that building!! We have to move forward!! Keep moving forward!!

At some point, we noticed one of the windows opened up and there was a human up there, firing a machinegun. We went in the same building and I saw in my HUD that some of our guys were pinned down in the building across. The human wasn't firing at us, but at the building across the street. All of a sudden, I realized how lucky we were because if he spotted us, we'd all be dead by now... We had to take out that machinegun in the window...

Jarod: Watch your fire!! Friendlies on the second floor!!

Radio: Roger that! Shifting fire!

There were a few enemy soldiers in the building and we smoked them... Either by a grenade, or a bullet, it didn't really matter... Fact is though, that they were rather incomplete and that the room got blown to bits and pieces... Once it was safe, we radioed to the other side that it was safe to move and once we got out, they got out and we moved on.

Radio: Be advised, more enemy troops are converging on the tank. Get there ASAP!

Blain: Roger that!! We're working on it, out!!

At some point, we arrived and saw the tank in the distance with a few guys. We blast our way through until we got close enough to the tank...

Blain: Bravo-three! This is Bravo-six, what's your status?! Over!

Radio: We're still surrounded!! There's just the four of us left! But the tank's still ok! Over!

Blain: Contact to the east and more flanking to the south!! Hold the perimeter!!

Radio: Bravo Six, this is War Pig! The main gun's offline but we still have our machinegun!!

Blain: Do everything you can to take these bastards out!! Don't let them get to the tank!!

Radio: Copy that Bravo-Six!

Not long after that, the humans stopped coming in from the front. As soon as we thought it was safe, we heard a loud explosion, and the other tank was blown up... It came from the south as humans placed stationary machineguns in the windows of the building and fired at us. We immediately took cover but it was too late for some of us...

Blain: Deadly 2-3-niner, this is Bravo Six! Requesting air support for fire mission, over!

Radio: Uh, negative, Bravo Six. UAV data shows that there's an enemy anti-aircraft vehicle to the south of your position. Until you take it out, we can not risk sending in any gunships, over.

Blain: Tavish!! Jarod!! Find that AA-vehicle and take it out so we can get some air support!!

Tavish: On it!!

Blain: All right, let's cover these guys!

“War pig” turned its turret to the south and fired upon humans while we sought cover behind the tank as we covered Tavish and Jarod. I know it was dead serious, but the way Tavish and Jarod were running... Hehehehe... It looked more like dancing as far as you can call it that... They got close enough and took cover behind a wall as Tavish threw an EMP grenade at it, and it shuts down completely. One of the guys that were with us got up and fired an anti-tank missile at the AA-vehicle and well, it got blown up... But that didn't mean the machineguns stopped firing in the windows. Jarod got out a laser and marked the building with it...

Blain: Deadly 2-3-niner, this is Bravo-six!! We got rid of the AA!! Put on a show for us!

Radio: OK, positive ID on your sparkle! We're coming in hot from the north-east! Standby!

Then not long after that, two gunships appeared and blew the frack out of that building... They kept hovering in front of it...

Radio: Uh, Two, do you see anyone left down there?

Radio: Negative. In other words, their in a better place now. A moment of silence for those humans.

Radio: Alright, we're outta here. Good luck boys, The Outlaws should return shortly to you to pick you up. Deadly 2-3-niner out.

Blain: Copy that Deadly 2-3-niner... Thanks for the assist... Bravo-six out... COMScann, the LZ is secure, bring in the engineers and let's get this tank moving...

Radio: Roger that. UAV data shows out remaining enemy infantry are on the run. Good job guys, all of you.

Everyone gathered around at the tank and could finally relax... Although the atmosphere was still tense, I was so tired all of a sudden and sat down somewhere alone. I was looking at the scenery and there were a lot of dead bodies... Although it was a huge victory for us by capturing Zakhaev and secured the VIP guy, I couldn't help but to feel sad as I was staring at the night sky. I got out my picture of Nicole and stared at it as I was talking to her in my mind... Then all of a sudden, I felt a hand on my shoulder... I turned my head and noticed it was Scyth... But he was alone...

Scyth: Can she hear you...?

Blain: Hopefully...

Scyth: What did you say to her...?

Blain: None of you're damn business...

Scyth: Hehehehehe...

Blain: Where's Zakhaev...?

Scyth: I let him go...

Blain: ... What...?

Scyth: Yeah.

Blain: Why...? I thought you said you wanted him dead...?

Scyth: Yeah... But he'll lead us to Miller... And once Miller is out of the way, we can take out Zakhaev... And we'll be safe and be able to end the war... And continue with our lives...

Blain: How would you know that Zakhaev is keeping his word...?

Scyth: Because he wants Miller dead as well so I made a deal with him... He'll deliver us Miller in exchange for my hit fee... Zakhaev is dead except he doesn't realize it yet... Making a deal with me was the biggest mistake he ever made... He just signed his own death warrant...

Blain: ... *nods*

Scyth: Come on, let's get back to the others...

So we went back to the tank... But then I noticed Jarod carrying Tavish who was yelling his lungs out. I noticed his right sleeve was cut and that he was bleeding... Jarod placed him down carefully as a medic took over...

Tavish: Aaah!! fracking hell, it hurts man!!

Medic: Stay still!!

Tavish: Aww frack!! I'm gonna die man!! It hit an artery!! I can feel it!! OW!!! frack!!

Jarod: Hold still Tavish!!

Medic: Grab his arm!!

Tavish: OOOOW!!!!

Medic: Hold him still!!

Tavish: I've never been shot in my entire life, man!! And now I'm gonna die!!

Jarod: You're not gonna die, Tavish!! Just keep still!!

Then the medic cut open his sleeve... And we all saw a very little scratch...

Jarod: Holy shoot Tavish!! It needs a tourniquet!!

Tavish: Oh shoot!! Oh shoot!! Don't let me die!!

Jarod: Don't look Tavish!!

Tavish: I need to look!!

Jarod: Don't do it!!

Then he looked to his arm and noticed the little scratch... Everyone who saw him burst out laughing, including me and Scyth... The medic wasn't really amused though... He got out a plaster with some cartoon character on it and placed it on the little scratch... Then he was amused and burst out laughing, shortly followed by everyone else...

Not long after that, the Outlaw gunships arrived. The tank got secured by a gunship so that it would be airlifted to Azerbaijan. They hovered just above the ground and we got in quickly. As I entered, I noticed Vilani. Scyth, Jarod and Tavish got in as well... I noticed Vilani looked at me again and she smiled again...

Vilani: *kssht* Hey! Welcome back, sergeant! You did one hell of a job out there! *kssht*

Jarod: *ahem*

Vilani: *kssht* Hell, everyone did a great job out there. We just got word the VIP is back in Azerbaijan. Good job guys. We'll try to make this ride as smooth as possible. *kssht*

Keaton: *kssht* How about a little mood music boys? *kssht*

Then he put up some... Awful music... I didn't like it at all...

Vilani: I thought I told to throw that disk out of the window!

Keaton: Yes ma'am, I'll do it when we get back in Azerbaijan, over.

Vilani: *sighs*

Tavish: Yeah! She's right! How the hell can you listen to that kind of music?!

Jarod: Tavish! Calm down! You don't want to upset you're wound! *laughs*

Scyth: Hehehehehe...

Tavish: Hey, I told you, it fracking hurts, alright?!

Jarod: Yeah! We'll get you to surgery once we're in Azerbaijan! It's an emergency!! Whaaaaaaaaaaaa!!

Just gotta love these guys... Not long after that, we all took off... The doors were still wide open but it's actually really nice to fly with the doors wide open. You feel the wind at 340 kilometres an hour as we were flying above the large river. I could see in the distance that the night sky slowly made way for daylight as the stars slowly stopped shining... The way the light reflected from the water down below made it look as if thousands of stars were in the water while clouds slowly turned dark orange... It was a very beautiful sight to see and I thought about Nicole... I wish was here to see this... Hopefully, one day, she will... Maybe she was seeing it right now...

Seeing what we have accomplished today made me think that the war would be over in a few months... Maybe it's over in just a few weeks... I know we still have a long way to go, but I felt that it was possible for us to win this war, and break down the pillars that support the human regime. I stared outside once again and felt how my eyelids were getting heavier... And then I fell asleep

with a smile on my face...

21 - You only live once

I couldn't sleep for the night. With every second that passed by, I saw the sky getting lighter and lighter through the roof window. It turned dark orange with every now and then a shade of light blue, while the clouds slowly adapted their colors. It was wonderful to see, even though I was alone... I wish Blain could've seen this... Maybe he was seeing this right now...

I stayed with Mahabi until he fell asleep. After gazing at the stars for a while after he fell asleep, I went to Ceylan's room. As soon as I got in, I thought about what Mahabi said and I stared at Ceylan while she was asleep... And even though I had my doubts again, I didn't got in bed with her... I just sat at the small table, staring outside the window...

Ceylan: Psst... Hey... Hey, Nicole, wake up...

Nicole: Mmmhuh...?

Ceylan: Good morning...

Nicole: ... What time is it...?

Ceylan: Ten-forty five AM... Mahabi is awake... He's at the cafeteria...

Nicole: ... I know he's awake... I was with him last night...

Ceylan: ... Ooooooh...

I wasn't wide awake yet to realize what I just said. But the way Ceylan said "Ooooooh..." made it sound like I was at it again... I quickly opened my eyes and found myself with my head on the table and looked at Ceylan. My neck hurt a lot of the way my head was on the table though...

Ceylan: I see...

Nicole: No, not like that, you gotta believe me, please...

Ceylan: Calm down, I wasnt even thinking of that...

Nicole: ... Oh... So... Anything new...?

Ceylan: Yeah actually. Terry wants to move on in 3 days. Mahabi needs some more rest but he'll be alright...

Nicole: That's good to hear...

Ceylan: Hmm-mm...

Nicole: *yawns*

Ceylan: Can I ask you something...?

Nicole: Yeah sure... What's up...?

Ceylan: What were you doing with Mahabi anyway...?

Nicole: I wanted to check up on him to see how he was doing...

Ceylan: In the middle of the night...?

Nicole: ... Yeah... I couldn't sleep...

Ceylan: I see...

Once we arrived at the cafeteria, I noticed everyone else. I saw Lattei and Mahabi, Terry, Rachel and Axel, who was sitting by himself. It's been a while since I've seen Lattei and Rachel, and they welcomed

me with open arms. Rachel just literally jumped in my arms and kept on hugging me... And then I noticed Terry... And Ceylan was right... He was changed. He didn't try to show it but... Terry walked up to me and handed me a plate of food as he didn't say anything. He looked at me for a short moment and looked away, and I felt as if I could bury myself... I sat somewhere alone with my plate until I noticed Mahabi sitting across the table...

Mahabi: 'Sup, this seat taken?

Nicole: No, go ahead...

Mahabi: Thanks.

I guess Mahabi was starved... The way he shoved the food down his throat was really fast... I wasn't really that hungry but I had to eat... The food went rather reluctant down my throat... And as I was eating, I kept on staring at Ceylan and Terry, while Mahabi looked over his shoulder every now and then... And well, Terry was talking to Lattei as Rachel and Ceylan sat somewhere else and were messing around... Then I noticed Mahabi looking all serious at me as his eyes were looking straight into mine...

Nicole: ... What's wrong...?

Mahabi: You know what's wrong...

Nicole: *sighs*

Mahabi: *shakes his head*

Nicole: I eh...

Mahabi: I know what your problem is, Nicole. You're thinking way too much about it.

Nicole: About what...?

Mahabi: ... Terry and Ceylan. That's Ceylan, right? The girl who's sitting with Rachel?

Nicole: Yeah...

Mahabi: You worry way too much Nicole. Don't think, just do it.

Nicole: ... Do what...?

I knew all too well what Mahabi meant. But I tried not to show it. Mahabi didn't buy it though... He kept staring in my eyes...

Mahabi: I saw the way you looked at her...

Nicole: ... Wh-What about it...?

Mahabi: Stop the acting already, Nic... I just see it... You like her...

Nicole: Maybe...

Mahabi: No, you do... I know it...

Nicole: But...

Mahabi and I looked over at Terry and Lattei, who were talking to each other. Every now and then, I noticed that Terry and Lattei looked at us...

Mahabi: Lattei is talking to Terry about it... But eh... Terry and you are the ones who need to solve it in the end. We can't do that for you.

Nicole: ... You know what happened between us...?

Mahabi: I might have a hunch... But eh, I'm not the one who's judging it...

Nicole: *sighs*

Mahabi: And eh... You're little secret stays between you and me, ok...? No one else needs to know...

Nicole: What secret...?

Mahabi: That you're in love with Ceylan...

Nicole: Well I... Eh...

Mahabi: Like I said, it stays between us...

Nicole: Thanks Mahabi...

Mahabi: Any time... But first, set things right with Terry...

Nicole: Yeah... I know...

Mahabi: *nods*

Nicole: But... What if Ceylan takes it the wrong way...? I mean... She doesn't necessarily need to have the same feelings I have for her...?

Mahabi: That's all up to you Nicole... I can't help you with that...

Nicole: *nods slowly*

Mahabi: So yeah...

Nicole: ... Can I ask you something Mahabi...?

Mahabi: Hmm...?

Nicole: Why are you and Lattei doing this...? Can I ask why you are helping Terry and me...?

Mahabi: Well it's because Terry cooks a lot better when he's happy...

Nicole: I'm serious Mahabi...

Mahabi: You think we need a reason to help you guys...?

Nicole: No...

Mahabi: My thoughts exactly...

It stayed quiet for a while...

Nicole: You ever had a girl Mahabi...?

Mahabi: ... Which one you mean out of the 23...? *grins*

Nicole: ... You serious...?

Mahabi: ... Yeah... I mean... I traveled a lot and... Well, settling down with a girl, a house, and a kid isn't exactly my thing... So eh... Yeah... Hehe...

Nicole: So... What did you do...?

Mahabi: Eeh... Well... There was a war, a few decades back and eh... Well, after the war was over, not everyone could live in prosperity because of certain circumstances. And eh... Lattei and I were born 7 years after the war was over. But eh, our group, or... family as I like to call it, were hunted down by almost everyone... Mostly because we pillaged small villages and raided people from their supplies in order for us to survive. And well, killing was necessary sometimes... At some point, our group got so large we established a community and a port on the coast of Isla Sohn Paradiso. It was an island, so heavily fortified and filled with people like us. GUN wouldn't dare to attack us on our own grounds, knowing they would lose it. Over the years, it got bigger and bigger and at some point, we moved to new locations to expand our ground. It was eh... Quite an adventure, I can tell you that... But for the last 2 years, we got killed off one by one by GUN, and even had people who snitched us... GUN thought we

were becoming a real threat and at some point, Lattei and I were forced to leave if we wanted to stay alive...

Nicole: I see...

Mahabi: The last 2 years were really harsh though... We had to change our way of living of which we were used to for so many years... Lattei witnessed how his parents were executed and well... It did leave a mark on him...

Nicole: What about you...?

Mahabi: Well, sometimes I still believe my parents are still alive... But maybe it's because I didn't witness their execution...

Nicole: I'm sorry...

Mahabi: *nods slowly* Maybe that's the reason why we went along with you and Terry...

Nicole: What do you mean...?

Mahabi: Going to Azerbaijan is a journey of a few hundred miles, taking months to get to your destination while death could be around any corner. You almost died, I almost died, but you know what Nicole...?

Nicole: What...?

Mahabi: It's an adventure... Experiencing such things enables you to say that you are alive and live life to the fullest... Even when the odds are against you, and even though fate is taking a crap on you're head, you'll be able to say that you're alive...

Nicole: Hehe... You're right on that...

Mahabi: *nods*

Nicole: I've never seen you so serious though...

Mahabi: Well, with every near-death experience, I change a little. I'll be alright though.

Nicole: ... What about me...?

Then Mahabi turned around and looked at Ceylan, who was hugging Rachel...

Mahabi: You'll be alright Nic... Just go for it... You only live once...

Nicole: Thank you Mahabi..

Mahabi: Any time...

It stayed silent for a long time as I was watching Ceylan... I felt a lot better now, knowing that Mahabi wouldn't have any trouble with it... Maybe it's because he's a guy though... But still, I was glad he understood... Then I looked over to Terry and was wondering what he was thinking... I guess Terry hated me because... Well... I slept with him or... That he knew that I liked Ceylan... Maybe that was the reason why he was acting like that towards me... I never thought that Terry would act like that, especially

towards me. And well, maybe because he liked me and... I didn't liked him in the way he thought it was... Whatever it was, the thinking suddenly got interrupted by a loud fart and a cough...

Mahabi: ... Whoa, that one trimmed my nosehair...

Nicole: ...

Mahabi: ... 'Scuse me, I gotta take a crap real bad...

Nicole: Yeah, thanks for sharing...

After he ran off, I walked away from the table... At least Mahabi is back to his old self again...

That evening, I took a shower in the girl's locker room... At first, I was a bit scared but I saw it was still daylight through the small windows. I guess it was way less scarier then it was at night... After raiding through some open lockers, I found a small bottle of shampoo and shower gel, which I was actually relieved to find. All those weeks, I've been taking showers without shampoo or shower gel, so finding this was a real relief. Everything was just fine until I heard a door slam... And then I saw her...

Ceylan: Hey! I didn't know you were here!

I didn't say anything, though. I was startled and just stood dead in my tracks watching her. And well, then she took off her clothes. For some reason, I just stared at her and watched how she got undressed.. And eh... Then she took off her panties and bent over to grab something... And... Well eh... Let's just say I squeezed the shampoo bottle so hard, that everything squirted out... Heh... Then she got up and walked to the shower next to me as she kept on blabbering about all sorts of things. And I just kept staring at her body you know... I think she didn't realize it, but I tried my best not to jump on top of her like some animal... Something slipped out of her hands and it landed not too far from my paws... She bents over again to pick it up and eh... I had a really hard time to hold myself... I mean, it's not every day you see someone you have a crush on being naked in front of you... And then she looked at me... I was so nervous... And I had no idea why...

Ceylan: Can I borrow you're shower gel...?

Nicole: Huh, what?

Ceylan: Can I borrow you're shower gel? I'm out...

Nicole: Oh! Yeah! Sure! It's not actually mine, but I found it, so I guess that makes me the owner of it, right? Heh...

Ceylan: ... Are you feeling alright...?

Nicole: Perfect! Eh... Heh... Eh... Yeah...

Ceylan: Ok... So...

Nicole: Hm?

Ceylan: ... Shower gel...?

Nicole: Oh yeah! Right!

Ceylan: You sure you're feeling alright...?

Nicole: *nods quickly*

So I gave her the shower gel... I was making such an @\$\$ of myself in front of her... And I realized it all too well... And that made me even more nervous... But eh... The fact that she was washing her breasts and her... "Thingly" didn't really aid to the situation. I just stood there like a zombie, still holding the

shampoo bottle. And eh... At some point, she turned the water hotter and I could hear her sigh as the steam slowly floated up. And at some point, she turned off the water and looked at my stomach...

Ceylan: What's that...?

Nicole: Huh...?

She placed her paw on my stomach and gently rubbed it until the scar I had on my stomach was visible. I can honestly say that I had a really weird feeling in my stomach, and wished she would continue to do it... But she didn't...

Ceylan: What happened...? How did you get that scar...?

Nicole: Oh... That...

Ceylan: Hmm...?

Nicole: I eh... I was stabbed a long time ago...

Ceylan: Stabbed?!

Nicole: *nods*

Ceylan: Why would anyone stab a girl?!

Nicole: I have no idea... But... He did... So... There's not much use to keep thinking about it... It happened and there's no way you can change it...

Ceylan: Yeah...

Nicole: The doctors said it was the cause for my miscarriage... *sighs*

Ceylan: Oh... I'm sorry to hear that, hun...

And then she hugged me all of a sudden... Because she was taller than me, my head stuck just above her boobs... It felt a bit awkward at first, but as soon as I slowly clenched my arms around her back and closed my eyes, the awkward feeling faded off into a happy one... I could hear her heart beat that seemed to go faster the longer we held each other. But then she let go... And so did I... And I just sighed as I watched her getting dressed again while I was still naked under the shower. Before she left the locker room...

Nicole: Ceylan...?

Ceylan: Yeah...?

Nicole: ... Can I stay with you tonight...?

Then she smiled at me...

Ceylan: Sure... Don't worry about it...

Nicole: ... Thanks...

Ceylan: *smiles*

And then she walked out of the door... I sighed in relief and let myself down as I sat on the ground while the hot water was still running over me. For some reason, I couldn't let go of the images of her body. How it was possible for her, I have no idea, but her body was just perfect, like everything was in the right proportions. Her breasts weren't really that big but... Like I would give a damn about that... But I didn't just think about her body though... Also... I guess it was the hug that gave the final blow. It was the hug that made me realize I was in love with her... And although a lot of people wouldn't agree on my

thoughts of her, I couldn't care less... I really liked her, and there was no way I would let anyone else stop me from letting her know that I liked her... Like Mahabi said... You only live once... Best take advantage of that while I still had the chance... And I can only hope that Blain and Kaelyn can forgive me... Who knew that taking a shower could be so hard...?

22 - Pandemic...

Vilani: Sergeant... Hey... Wake up...

I felt that someone was gently shaking my shoulder. As soon as I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was that the others were walking around on the flight deck, on their way to the base quarters. I looked up and noticed Vilani was the one shaking my shoulders...

Vilani: Wake up, sir... We're back in Azerbaijan...

Blain: Oh...? I eh... I must dozed off...

Vilani: Sleeping like baby sir...

So I got up and walked towards the base...

Vilani: Oh and... Sir...?

Blain: Yes lieutenant?

Vilani: I eh... Do you where my cousin is...?

Blain: ... Who?

Vilani: Sergeant Regan... I eh... I haven't heard of him yet...

Blain: Lemme check.

I placed my helmet back on and cycled through the HUD to see if there was anything known about casualties. Regan wasn't one of 'em. Then I came across a mission briefing that one of the gunship's received. According to that data, Regan was on it...

Vilani: Anything known yet...?

Blain: Regan's gunship had an added objective, lieutenant, on the way to Azerbaijan. You told us that there was a prison camp and a supply depot, and their job was to explore the place.

Vilani: ... Enemy activity...?

Blain: ...

Vilani: ... Well...?

Blain: Nothing yet, lieutenant...

Vilani: *sighs in relief*

Blain: Don't worry lieutenant, he'll be back before you know it.

Vilani: Thank you, sir...

At that point, Jarod barged through the door...

Jarod: Vilani!! You gotta- Oh... Hello... sir.

Blain: Jarod...

I noticed how Vilani smiled at Jarod, and Jarod quickly took off his cap as he looked at her. He smiled back at her rather nervously.

Vilani: What's up, Jarod?

Jarod: Regan's got information about the prison camp...

Vilani: He does...? Are there a lot of people...?

Jarod: Yeah... And eh... Well, you gotta hear it yourself!

Vilani/Blain: What?!

Jarod : Come on!!

Jarod dragged Vilani along the hallway as I ran after them. He took us to a large room, filled with all sorts of computers with high tech digital crap and huge monitors on the wall... I noticed Scyth and every other squad leader in the room...

Scyth: Can you get a visual, Regan...?

Radio: Eeeh, I'm still working on it... This place is sick... We thought it was a prison camp but...

Blain: What's going on...?

Scyth: Regan reported a lot of maimed humans and furies inside the compounds...

Blain: Their injured...?

Scyth: No, apparently, their sick...

Radio: I see one with open wounds and swears... Man-o-man, if you could see this shoot... You wouldn't believe me if I just told you...

Scyth: It seems their infected with something... But what caused it, we don't know...

Blain: I see...

Radio: Live video feed streaming, stand by.

Vilani: And that's when- *gasps*

Blain: What?

Vilani stared at the big monitor like everyone else... What we saw was horrifying... You saw the place like Regan did, because his camera was integrated with his helmet, like every other one. It's part of the Net-Bat system... But the things he showed us were horrifying... You saw humans with open sores and wounds and some were even deformed to the point you couldn't even tell it was a human. And there's a few furies as well...

Blain: Holy... shoot...

Radio: Looks like these guys are dead.

Blain: It's a virus...?

Scyth: *nods* I just found out when I got here.

Blain: Damn... Regan has taken precautions, right?

Scyth: Yeah, he did.

Radio: The smell is unbearable here... This place is nothing like a prison camp at all... It looks like these humans are in quarantine, but I guess they just abandoned them... Listen, I have to continue. I thought I just give you a heads up of what's happening. We'll take care of any survivors and try to get some more clues. We got 5 medics examining a few survivors right now.

Scyth: Be careful.

Radio: Will do. Bravo-3 out.

Vilani: That's why we had to extract Jones... He's got information about the virus...

Blain: I think we need a word with him... Where is he now?

Vilani: Interrogation.

Scyth: Alright, let's go.

So the four of us went to interrogation where he was waiting... We took our seats and recorded our conversation...

Jones: I don't want to be treated like a war criminal.

Scyth: You're not being treated like one.

Blain: I assume you deserted?

Jones: No.

Blain: Then where you're from?

Jones: The ICA...

Scyth: It says here, you're a lieutenant.

Jones: That's right.

Vilani: Can I get you anything?

Jones: Glass of water, please...

Vilani: I'll get it for you.

Scyth: So what's the deal then...?

Jones: The ICA has nothing to do with everything happening outside...

Jarod: Then what happened?

Jones: Uh... You know what the ICA is right?

Scyth: Undercover operations and secret police?

Jones: That's right... I've stumbled across corruption within GUN by accident. The ICA is neutral in this... After examining and cross interrogation with war criminals, it all led to a guy named Miller. But... There's nothing the ICA can do... We're powerless... GUN is all powerful now... The pressure grew larger on the ICA to release what we considered to be war criminals...

Scyth: But that doesn't explain why there's a war being waged outside...

Jones: It's because the furries commenced a bio-chemical warfare on the humans...

Blain: What...?

Jones: That's what they believe.

Scyth: Who are "they"...?

Jones: Miller and every other high ranked commander in the GUN legions... So that's why they deployed troops and the war broke loose...

Blain: Bio-chemical warfare...?

Scyth: ... But we had no reasons to start one...

Jones: That crossed my mind as well, so I investigated it. So far, the virus killed millions of humans up

north... That's why they started a war...

Blain: Yeah but, why was it never known to anyone...?

Jones: I have no idea...

Scyth: What about vaccines...? Are they in development...?

Jones: *nods*

Blain: ... Damn...

Jones: But something doesn't add up...

Blain: What is?

Jones: The first casualties of the virus were reported BEFORE the war broke loose. It spreads out very rapidly, which is something we've never seen before. Within the first week, 1,9 million people died already... And that's just the first week...

Scyth: ... Whoa...

Then Vilani came back and placed a glass of water on the table for Jones.

Jones: Thank you.

Vilani: *nods*

Scyth: ... So... Any information about the virus...?

Jones: Yes...

He opened up his jacket and got out a very small digital card thing.

Jones: Does anyone have a PDA...?

Vilani: I do. *gives PDA to Jones*

Jones: Alright... *inserts card in PDA*

He placed the PDA down on the table and a holographic screen opened up. All sorts of data are displayed...

Jones: I'm neither a scientist nor a doctor but... You can see the symptoms of an infected person here. You see the open sores they have. In the lightest case scenario, they simply just slip into a coma and die.

Scyth: Hmm-mm...

Jones: The strange thing however... Is that these symptoms resemble a lot to a virus dr. Ivo Robotnik developed a long time ago for his bio-chemical weapons. Their almost identical.

Scyth and I looked at each other... It's true... Robotnik did develop a virus... He never had the chance to deploy his bio-chemical weapons...

Vilani: Yeah but... Just because the symptoms are the same doesn't mean it's the exact same virus...

Jones: It is... Scientists took a sample of it and researched it to develop a vaccine against it... But to no avail... But after going through old data Robotnik left for us, it turned out it is indeed the exact same virus Robotnik developed years ago...

Scyth: What about those scientists...? Are they still busy to develop a vaccine...?

Jones: No. Their all dead. GUN wants to cover up the virus so that no one would ever know.

Blain: But why?

Jones: I have no idea... That's what I'm hoping to find out here. The question still remains, who released that virus...?

Blain: Who had access to it...?

Jones: That's the thing. No one knows, because that particular detail was erased from the database. Someone has been sabotaging it...

Scyth: Something still bothers me though...

Jones: What is...?

Scyth: You said the virus claimed its first casualties before GUN declared war...

Jones: Yes.

Scyth: Then how come no one knew anything about the virus...?

Jones: I have no idea...

I tried to remember as much as possible... Things just don't add up to the whole situation happening outside...

Jones: ... Do you remember that outbreak in Westopolis 2 years ago...?

Scyth: ... No...

Blain: Vaguely... I seem to recall... There was something on the news about that...

Jones: *nods* Hundreds of humans and 52 furies died... It was an accident when they got hold of a deadly new disease... The government called it... "A natural infection carried by the animals"... I can assure you, there was nothing natural about it...

Scyth: Same virus...?

Jones: No... Research showed out it was a different virus, also developed by Robotnik himself... So there are two viruses... But we know that this one was the very first one that caused casualties... But fortunately, it got contained before it could spread out any further... The virus was known as "Romulus"...

Blain: What about the other one...? The one who caused the death of millions...?

Jones: It's known as Remus...

Blain: *nods*

Jones: So bottom line is... Someone sabotaged everything and made use of the political situation the government had... Whoever it was, he was pretty clever...

Scyth: ... Yeah...

Jarod was really quiet all this time... He looked at us...

Jarod: Let's get everything straight here...

Blain: Alright... Titan gets shot down on the way...

Jarod: 241 million casualties during the nuclear holocaust...

Vilani: A virus that killed millions of humans...

Jarod: Something isn't right.

Scyth: What?

Jarod: I don't know. It doesn't connect. Our Titan got shot down after the virus breakout and before the nuclear strike. It happened before Miller overthrew his own government... And if it did, wouldn't they use the virus to wipe us out instead? Someone started a bio-chemical warfare on our side, no doubt about it...

Blain: Except the question is, who released it...?

It stayed silent for a while...

Jarod: ... Unless the humans released the virus themselves...

Jones: Whadda ya mean?

Jarod: Think about it... Miller committed a coup with some of his best friends... The first one failed. Why did it failed?

Scyth: ... No idea...

Jarod: To make a coup succeed, what do you need...?

Blain: Chaos...

Jarod: Exactly... When everyone is in chaos, they'll listen to the person with the biggest mouth... So... So the humans released the virus so that there would be chaos... And it would explain why they never wanted to let anyone know about it...

Vilani: Seems plausible...

Jarod: And then they blamed the virus on us so that they would have a reason to wage a war...

Scyth: Well... Don't jump the gun here guys. All we have is theories... Besides, it's not relevant to speculate about it while we can do something about it...

Vilani: ... Like what...?

Scyth: ... Glad you asked... *grins*

23 - The best friend I've ever had...

That night I was on my way to Ceylan's room when I heard Terry. I looked around for him and he was talking to Rachel while she was in bed... Terry sat on the edge of the bed and was telling a story to her... I was leaning against the doorpost and listened to them...

Rachel: Then what happened?

Terry: Well, the king got pretty mad then. So he gathered all of his best warriors and the one who could return the princess would marry her.

Rachel: Sounds pretty cheap...

Terry: Well, yeah.

Rachel: ... So then what happened?

Terry: Well... When-

Rachel: Don't you ever get scared...?

Terry: ... Why's that...?

Rachel: Because... Sometimes... Sometimes I'm really scared... Like... When we were crossing the bridge or...

Terry: I know... But we're here to protect you...

Rachel: I know but...

Terry: My mom always told me to sing a little song when you're scared.

Rachel: A song...?

Terry: Hmm-mm... It really helps and before you know it, it goes away...

Rachel: *nods*

Terry: But hey, don't worry about it, ok...?

Rachel: Okay...

Terry: Now where was I...?

Rachel: Eh... The king gathered all his warriors to save the princess.

Terry: Oh yeah. When all of the warriors gathered around at the king, there was a little guy who... Eh... Sold melons... And he vowed in front of everyone else to save the princess, because he was deeply in love with her... And so, the warriors set off, to the castle to defeat the dragon and to free the princess...

Rachel: ... Melons?

Terry: ... Yeah. ... Melons.

Nicole: Wasn't that supposed to be a tailor...?

Then Terry and Rachel looked up to me...

Terry: No, a melons salesman, a guy who sells melons. *smiles*

Nicole: Alright... It's your story...

Rachel: Then what happened?

Terry: He, eh... Sold a lot of melons and became filthy rich. The end.

Then he got up to walk towards me. I noticed he wanted to talk to me but...

Rachel: Awww!! If he sold all those melons, then who saved the princess?!!

Nicole: Yeah, who saved the princess...?

Rachel: It couldn't be the evil sir Lancelot!

Nicole: ... Lancelot is evil...? Now there's an interesting turn of events... *smiles*

Terry: *sighs*

Terry sat down again and continued the story. The fairytale he was telling wasn't quite accurate to the original. In fact, everything was improvised but it was fun to hear. Lots of laughs... At some point, Rachel fell asleep and we both walked away quietly... On our way, we didn't say anything. Truth be told, I didn't know what I had to say to Terry, and I guess he didn't know either... We reached the swimming pool and I sat on the ledge as I let my paws down in the water...

Terry: *sighs*

Nicole: ...

Terry: Look... I don't really know what to say, Nic... What do you want from me, an apology...?

Nicole: No...

Terry: *sighs*

Nicole: All I need is for you to understand... That's all I want...

Terry: Yeah but take a look from my position... I need you to understand as well...

Nicole: I know... And I'm sorry...

Terry: You think it was a wrong thing to do...?

It stayed silent for a little while... I thought it was, but at the same time it wasn't... But the water felt really nice... I wiggled my toes in the water and moved my paws around...

Terry: Hm...?

Nicole: *shakes head*

Terry: ... I don't know anymore, Nic. I'm sorry. I gotta go.

And he just walked away as I watched him leave... "It's now or never" I thought...

Nicole: I don't... I don't think it was a mistake... But... It was a wrong thing to do...

Then he turned around... After standing there for a short moment, he came back and sat next to me...

Nicole: I don't wanna lose you, Terry... I like you a lot, I really do but... I don't wanna lose a very good friend because of what happened...

Terry: ... Yeah...

It stayed silent for a short moment... Terry never said what he thought about it...

Nicole: What about you...? What do you think...?

Terry: Eh... I don't know, Nic... Things aren't being made easy for us... *sighs*

Nicole: Yeah...

Terry: I was scared shootless afterwards you know... I didn't know what caused it, and... I don't know, it never really got away...

It stayed silent for a while...

Nicole: ... You think I'm a good friend to you, Terry...?

Terry: *nods slowly* Yeah... And not because of what happened...

Nicole: Heh...

Terry: ... And if you would actually look you're age, it probably would have never happened...

Nicole: Hehehehe... Yeah but... Do you think you would let this stand between our friendship...?

Terry: No... I love you a lot Nic, but... Not in the way I thought it was... For some reason, I just cant...

Nicole: And it's not something I want either...

Terry: Things just have been really... shooty lately... And... It just happened, you know...

Nicole: *nods*

Terry: But eh... I don't think it was a mistake either... And truth be told, I don't regret it... It's just what I felt afterwards was... I don't know, I wasn't myself but... Anyone else wouldn't make too much of a deal of it but... I was really scared of something, and I didn't know why...

Nicole: ... Was it me...?

Terry: No...

Then it stayed silent for a long time... The only thing we heard was the water sloshing against the pool edges as I could see the light reflecting in it...

Nicole: What time is it...?

Terry: Half past eleven...

Nicole: *nods*

Terry: What are you gonna do now...?

Nicole: I'm going to bed soon...

Terry: No, I mean... Are you gonna tell Ceylan...?

Nicole: Maybe... I don't know yet... I don't think she'll take it too kindly... And I don't wanna risk that...

Terry: I understand...

Nicole: So... What's the plan for tomorrow...?

Terry: I think its best we're leaving tomorrow... I talked to everyone else and they agreed... Mahabi is on the road to recovery but he'll make it...

Nicole: Azerbaijan is not that far anymore, is it...?

Terry: No... If everything works with us, we'll be sipping tea in Azerbaijan in a few weeks...

Nicole: I'm not really fond of tea...

Terry: ... Hot coco then...

Nicole: That sounds much nicer...

Terry: So, if everything works with us, we'll be sipping hot coco in Azerbaijan in no time...

Nicole: *smiles*

Then again, it stayed silent for a moment... I noticed from the corner of my eyes that Terry looked at me with a serious face, but as soon as I faced him, his expression turned into a smile...

Terry: You know...

Nicole: Hm...?

Terry: You've got to be the best friend I've ever had... I never imagined someone like you being my best friend...

Nicole: Whadda ya mean someone like me...? What's that supposed to mean?

Terry: You know... Someone... Dare I say it...?

Nicole: What?

Terry: Someone old...

Nicole: That has nothing to do with it...

Terry: Maybe not... I don't know... But I do know that no one can take away your affection towards everyone else... I mean... No matter how grim the future might look, I can honestly say I'm glad to have known you... And I hope that whatever happens, you'll find what you're looking for... You manage to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, which is something I never could, let alone in hard times like this. You keep on loving people and manage to stay strong, even though the odds are against you... I envy you, Nicole... I really do, and... I wanted to let you know that you mean a lot to me...

Nicole: ... Well... I can honestly that I'm flattered but... What's with the sudden seriousness so all of a sudden...?

Terry: Because it might be too late to say when I'm not here anymore...

Nicole: Don't talk like that... We all get to Azerbaijan in one piece... I can't imagine myself sipping hot coco there without you...

Terry: *smiles*

Nicole: We'll make it...

Terry: ... Yeah... We'll make it... It's nothing... We'll make it...

Terry and I hugged each other for a long time. We hugged before, but there was something different about this hug...

After about an hour or so, we went to bed... Well, I went over to Ceylan's room... She was asleep and I just crawled in bed next to her... For a moment there, I stared outside the window, looking at the night sky, and thinking about everything... I didn't understand the things that were happening outside and although we haven't seen war in weeks, it's still a scary thing to see the deserted streets and hear the total silence... Everywhere you looked, there were no signs of life... And that still scared me a lot... But everything seemed to fade away as I felt Ceylan's warm breath in my neck... So I faced her... And she was asleep... I didn't know why I was so captivated by her but for some reason, she did... The feeling I had only got stronger the longer I was staring at her... I let my hand going through her long brown hair... I

wish she was awake... I wish she knew how I felt about her... I wish I could feel her... I wanted her to touch my face with her soft paws... There were so many things I wanted, and yet I realized all too well that was not gonna happen... I placed her paws in mine and felt how warm they were... All sorts of thoughts ran through my mind at that point... Even a few thoughts that I considered to be "cheeky"... But I didn't realized those thoughts... And as I looked at her face again, I noticed her eyes were opening slowly, and she kept on staring at me with a sleepy look...

Nicole: Hey...

Ceylan: ... Hey...

Nicole: I didn't wake you, did I...?

Ceylan: No...

Nicole: ... *sighs*

Ceylan: What's wrong...?

Nicole: Ceylan...?

Ceylan: ... Yeah...?

Nicole: I wanna ask you something...

Ceylan: ... Sure... What is it...?

Nicole: ...What would you do... If... If someone made you feel comfortable... That the same person would comfort you when you're having sorrow, regrets, and misunderstandings of all the things happening...? What if that grows out to be more then just that...? What if you realize the person would never love you in the way you wanted it to be...?

Ceylan: ... Well... Regardless of the person loving you or not in the way you wanted it to be, I would keep that person close... It would make a great friend instead...

Nicole: ... No matter what happens...?

Ceylan: No matter what...

Nicole: *weak smile* Thank you, Ceylan...

Ceylan: No problem Nicole...

Nicole: *sighs*

Ceylan: ... It's about Terry, isn't it...?

I didn't want Ceylan to know that she was the one I meant... So I nodded to make her believe it was about Terry... She stroked her paw through my hair and kept assuring me everything was gonna be alright... I can't explain how I felt that exact moment, but it was a wonderful feeling... So I did the same to her... I wanted her to feel the same... After a while, she fell asleep again, but I didn't... I just continued to look at her... I close my eyes for a short moment and thought about her... As soon as I opened my eyes, I kissed her gently... But she didn't wake up... I placed her paw in mine again, and kept her close like she said and kept on cuddling her... The familiar feelings came back once again, and the longer I held her, the stronger it got... I kissed her gently again and looked at her for a while... Then I felt my eyelids getting heavier, as I felt myself floating away and was still holding on to her hand...

I woke up by the sounds of footsteps in the hallway... I just thought it was Terry or someone else so I didn't really make a big deal out of it... As I closed my eyes again, I thought I was imagining it... But then I heard people talking... Did I hear it right...? I listened again... Silence... But then the whispers came back... And it wasn't from someone familiar... I pinched myself to see if I wasn't dreaming... Then I looked outside the window and I could see flashes of light moving through the street... As soon as my eyes got

used to the darkness, I noticed 4 humans standing outside... I felt chills down my spine and gently shook Ceylan awake...

Nicole: Ceylan...! Ceylan...!! Wake up...!!

Ceylan: Mhuh...?

Nicole: Wake up...! There are humans outside on the street...!

Ceylan: *gasps* Soldiers...?!

Nicole: No, I don't think so...! Their only with a few...! I think there are people inside this building too...! We gotta warn the others...!

Ceylan: No...! Don't go out of this room...!! Stay here...!!

Nicole: We can't just-...!!

At that point, Ceylan muffled my mouth and quickly threw the bed-sheet on the ground next to her. She held on to me as rolled off the bed and we landed on the bed-sheet so that it wouldn't sound so loud when we landed on the wooden floor. Then not long after that, the door opened up slowly and a flashlight was shining through... And we could see the black human postures in the doorway...

???: All the rooms are empty...

???: Yeah... Let's move on...

Ceylan: ... Mahabi is in the next room...!!

Nicole: We gotta do something...!

Ceylan: Alright...! Alright...! We're gonna move slow...

Nicole: Ok... Ok... I'm ready...

We sneaked to the door and peeked around the doorpost... I didn't see any humans in the hallway, but I noticed they were in Mahabi's room...

???: It's a furrie...

???: He's wounded...

???: Yeah... Let's put him out of his misery...

Ceylan and I slowly got inside... And I noticed they were heavily armed with weapons... I never felt this scared and nervous in my entire life, but as soon as one of them grabbed a knife to kill Mahabi in his sleep, something just snapped... I kicked the weapon out of the human's hands from the back, then immediately grabbed his right arm and held it with all my strength as I kicked him in the waist... The other one turned around and aimed his weapon at me, but Ceylan smacked him really hard in the face... And I saw how she sliced his face open... He was killed instantly and dropped dead on the floor... In the mean time, I placed my foot in the human's neck and slowly build up pressure against it... I was hoping he would give up... But as I stared at the human, I noticed it was a human girl... And as I looked at the bed, I noticed Mahabi was all baffled but quickly jumped up... I heard the human girl whimper in pain but there was nothing she could do to get free... We tried to reason with her for a short moment until I noticed from the corner of my eyes that she was grabbing something... In a desperate attempt, she swung her left arm towards me... Then it happened... I yelled as loud as I could and released the pressure on her neck... There was a loud snap... A bone snap... And she fell on the ground as something else fell next to her...

The metallic object hit the ground... And I noticed it was a knife... I stared at the dead human girl with the dislocated neck as her eyes were wide open... And eh... I didn't know what to do... All I could do was to stand there looking at her... I took a life... It's something I never imagined I would do... And it was awful... I got pushed outside the room by Mahabi as he had a weapon shouldered that one of the humans was carrying. Ceylan followed not long after that... And well... It didn't took long for Mahabi to realize what was happening...

Mahabi: We have to split up, their coming in! I'm gonna look for Lattei and Axel! Go!!

We couldn't even respond to Mahabi. He ran away just like that... And he was right... I heard them... I could hear them running through the hallways, yelling at each other... And at that point, I got so scared that I couldn't do anything. I kept on looking at the girl whose life I took, while I couldn't move myself. I had to look, as if I had to confront myself with what I've done and had to bare the consequences of my actions... It seemed like every sound in the world started to fade off slowly as I heard gunfire echoing throughout the hallway. Even when Ceylan yelled at me to go, I didn't move an inch. At some point, I felt something whizzing by. I didn't realize that I almost got shot. I slowly turned my head from where I felt the whizzing and saw two human postures running towards us. I could hear Ceylan whimpering in pain as I just stood there, watching the human postures getting closer and closer... Then something pushed me violently to the ground as the yelling continued on... I saw the butt of a rifle battering my face over and over again, but the strange thing was that I didn't feel anything... It was another human girl who was attacking me, and her eyes were cold... Like there was no life in there... Just plain hate and anger... The attack suddenly stopped when the other human who was attacking Ceylan felt dead next to me... The human girl, who was attacking me, looked up... I had trouble to keep my eyes open but I saw it was Axel... He pushed the girl violently against the wall... He grabbed her hair and smacked her face against the wall a couple of times before he slits her throat with a blade... But then more humans arrived and they looked baffled at the dead bodies...

Human: Son of a dog...

Axel: We're not the ones who started it... *wipes blade clean*

Human: But that doesn't change the fact you're dead soon...

Axel: I'm sorry to have taken the lives of you're men, but you would have done the same in my situation...

Human: No... In you're situation; I would have clobbered you to death and actually like it... Then I would piss on you're fracking corpse...

Axel: Then I suggest you stop talking and get on with it...

Human: You've got nothing. You've got nothing but your knuckles and your fancy blades... We have guns...

Axel: No... What you have are bullets, and the hope that when your guns are empty, I'm no longer be standing... Because if I still am, you'll all be dead before you've reloaded your weapons...

Human: Oh I can't wait to see that happening...

At that point, Axel threw the blade he was holding towards a human... It hit the human in the head and dropped dead next to the others... The other humans were looking baffled at first but then opened fire to

Axel who jumped sideways in the mean time, throwing another blade he got from under his jacket as he was hiding behind a pillar... And the second human dropped dead... Then another shot was heard and the last human dropped dead... As I looked to my left, I noticed Ceylan holding a pistol she got from the human who was dead next to her... Then Axel walked towards us...

Axel: You guys ok?!

Ceylan: N-No...

Axel: Nicole?!

Nicole: I eh.....

Axel: Try to get up!

I was so dizzy and disoriented that I couldn't get up... Axel helped Ceylan sitting up, but as soon as he noticed I had trouble to get up as well, he helped me getting up...

Axel: Hold still... You're face is bleeding...

Nicole: I-Is it bad...?

Axel: It has a few deep cuts...

Mahabi: Nicole?!!! Ceylan?!!!

Axel: Over here!!!

The running through the corridors got louder and at some point, I noticed Lattei's face above me... He looked shocked...

Lattei: ... What the hell did they do to you...? You alright...?

Nicole: *nods slowly*

Mahabi: Up you go, Ceylan, easy...

Ceylan: ... Where are Terry and Rachel...?

Lattei: We couldn't find them...

Axel: Eh, let's get you inside, and lock the door encase there's more. We're gonna look for them...

Lattei carried me inside the room as Axel and Mahabi carried Ceylan... She was way too big to be carried by one person... They placed us inside on the bed and then they ran off... It took a long time before I was recovered from the disorientation felt the unbearable pain in my face... I took a few deep breaths and told Ceylan I was gonna look for Terry and Rachel as well... I stumbled towards the door and continued into the dark hallway...

It was silent... Very silent... I heard my own footsteps echoing and had the feeling I could be attacked at any moment... But it never happened... I was afraid to be alone like that, but couldn't stand the thought for not trying to look for Terry... It was the least thing I could do for him... He's a friend after all... Then at some point, I reached the hallway... Walking went rather slow, because I was starting to feel dizzy again... I had to lean against the wall every now and then. And at some point, I walked passed the cafeteria... I thought I saw a figure moving in the large windows in the doors, so I slowly opened it...

Nicole: T-Terry...? Is that you...?

I was really scared to walk in like that but... I had to find Terry and Rachel... As I walked through the cafeteria, I noticed three dead human bodies on the ground... Further up was a bloodstained knife that

Terry was always carrying... He had to be around... I peeked around another corner but there was no one there... I kept on walking until I heard voices through a door... So I opened it slowly... And I saw Terry down on his knees comforting Rachel as she was sobbing...

Terry: Ssh... I-It's ok... It's all over now...

Nicole: Terry...?

Terry: Nicole...?

I stumbled towards him and cuddled Terry and Rachel... I was really happy to see them being alright...

Nicole: You're alright...

Terry: Y-yeah... Are the o-others safe...?

Nicole: Yeah... Th-Their safe...

But... There was something wrong with him... As I looked up to his face, I noticed he was pale and I felt my shirt getting soaked... And as I let go of him, I noticed that there was blood on my shirt... And that there was blood on his stomach too... And that's when I realized he was shot in his stomach...

Terry: N-Nicole... Get the others to Azerbaijan... Get them safe... Take good care of Rachel...

Nicole: Terry...?

Terry: We've come a long way... Would be a shame to g-give up now, huh...? *weak smile*

Nicole: Terry, no...

Then all of a sudden, he collapsed and fell down on the ground...

Terry: Promise me you-you get them to Azerb-baijan safe, Nic... Please... Promise... Do i-it for me...

Nicole: I-I promise, Terry...

He looked at me and gave a weak smile as I placed my hand on his chest. I felt how his breathing became heavier and went slower and slower by the minute... He grabbed my hand and squeezed in it...

Terry: You k-know... I... I can see her you know...

Nicole: Who...?

Terry: S-Sarudja...

Nicole: Go to her... It's ok...

Terry: Th-Think she'll be mad for... F-for what I d-did...?

Nicole: No... No, I don't think she would be mad... She'll understand...

Terry: I-I'm scared Nic...

Nicole: Sssh... It's ok... Go to her...

Terry: I-I'm so sorry...

Nicole: There's nothing to be sorry for... You're the best friend I've ever had... Thank you for everything, Terry...

Terry: Th-Thanks fo-for being such a g-good friend, Nicole... I love you...

Nicole: I love you too...

Terry: *sings quietly* S-somewhere... Th-there's a... A place... Where... Where all you're troubles... f-fade away... Open up y-you're e-eyes..... And... And feel the...

I felt how Terry's grip loosened up and saw the life in his eyes slowly dieing out.... I kept squeezing his hand as I lay my head on his chest and caressed his short spiky hair... Not long after that, the singing faded off... And he stopped breathing... I closed his eyelids and kissed his forehead as I lay my head on his chest again... And just sobbed... After a while, I looked at his face and stared at it for a while... The longer I looked, the more it looked like as if he had a little weak smile on his face... And when I realized that, I couldn't hold myself anymore... I hugged Rachel while we were crying and held on to Terry... And I realized that Terry meant a lot more to me then I ever imagined...

24 - Believe...

Scyth told about his plan to Jones, Jarod and Vilani... About the deal he made with Zakhaev and that it's a matter of waiting now... I didn't know what made him so sure that we could end the war soon, but he was confident enough to say we could. But he still didn't mention to anyone what we supposedly are... Although we have no connection to each other in any way imaginable, Scyth and I have one thing in common... A long time ago, it actually meant something to be one. But the how, and why they never got answered, and it would probably stay that way. Being an Ultimate Lifeform means you dedicate your life to pursue you're creators ideal, even when you can think for yourself and actually have to reason with yourself for not taking drastic measurements. And remembering the good and the bad times I've had throughout my life made me think. Scyth and I are created for one sole purpose... We were created for warfare... And now I look at my hands and realize that nothing good can come out of it. I've seen it with the other lifeforms... I've seen them suffering... I experienced it myself... I was there... Constantly on the run for those who wish to eradicate you, to wipe you off the fracking planet... [br]

[br]

Jasco: Meh... I don't really mind... I got everything I want right here... A nice cozy fire, camping in the forests... A big fracking bag of marshmallows... Reliable weapons... My instincts and guts... Shame of the city being torn to pieces in the distance, otherwise it could make a great camping spot, but hey... I'm not complaining. At least we're safe for now... [br]

[br]

Blain: Yeah but... Don't you ever wonder what it's like when the war is over...? I mean... To actually live a free life...? [br]

[br]

Jasco: Of course I do, kid. But it's not relevant to think about it right now. [br]

Blain: Why not...? [br]

Jasco: Because the war is far from over, you know... But when it ends, I'll know I'll just go along with everyone else... It's because you wouldn't have a choice, just like now... [br]

[br]

Blain: Yeah... [br]

Tala: Heeeeey, what are you guys doing out here...? [br]

Blain: Hey Tala... [br]

Jasco: Watching the stars... [br]

Tala: ... Except for Cyrus... [br]

Blain: Yeah, he gets bored easily... He fell asleep the moment we sat down. [br]

Tala: Hehehe... [br]

Blain: Tala...? [br]

Tala: ... Hm? [br]

Blain: What are you gonna do after the war...? [br]

Tala: Heh... Good question... [br]

Jasco: Marrying me. [br]

Tala: Hehe, in you're dreams, fufag... [br]

Jasco: Well, you're in a good mood today... [br]

Tala: ... [br]

Jasco: No I mean it, you look happy. [br]

Blain: ... Yeah but... What if we don't live that long to see that day...? [br]

Jasco: I know what your problem is, Blain... [br]

Blain: ... What...? [br]

Jasco: You think about it way too much... [br]

Tala: Give the kid a break, will ya...? [br]

Jasco: No, I mean... We don't get to decide who dies and who survives. The how and the why is something you can't foresee. It's not up to us. [br]

[br]

Blain: Yeah but... Why are we fighting someone else's war...? [br]

Jasco: It's not just between Robotnik and the humans anymore... It's our war now too, Blain... It's not fighting for what we believe in anymore... We're fighting for our survival now... [br]

[br]

Blain: *nods slowly* [br]

Jasco: In fifty years from now, when you look back at your life, don't you want to be able to say that you had the guts to fight along...? [br]

[br]

I got gently shaken awake... I had trouble to open my eyes, but once I did, I noticed a sheet of paper in front of me with a pen. It took me a while to remember, but it was Jasco's letter... It was all very dark except the little lamp on the table offered illuminates the place a bit... Then I noticed that Scyth was the one who shook my shoulders... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Hey, you alright...? For a second there, it looked as if you were in a coma or something... [br]

Blain: *rubs eyes*... I'm just really tired... What time is it...? [br]

Scyth: Four twenty three AM... [br]

Blain: ... *sighs* [br]

Scyth: What's that...? [br]

Blain: What, this...? [br]

Scyth: Yeah...?[br]

Blain: It's eh... It's a friend's last wish... [br]

Scyth: Oooh... I see... [br]

Blain: What are you doing here anyway...? [br]

Scyth: Oh... Well, I couldn't sleep... So I went for a walk around the compound until I found you sleeping at the table... [br]

[br]

Blain: Hmm-mm... What's the mission tomorrow...? [br]

Scyth: Nothing yet... All we can do now is to wait... [br]

Blain: How would you know that Zakhaev is keeping his word...? I still don't understand how you can be so sure of it... [br]

[br]

Scyth: It's because Zakhaev is like me... He's willing to work together to get what he wants... [br]

[br]

Blain: Are you...? [br]

Scyth: What? [br]

Blain: Are you working together...? [br]

Scyth: I'm doing it right now... [br]

Blain: I trust you, Scyth... I hope you know what you're doing... [br]

Scyth: ... We'll make it... Together... [br]

[br]

Blain: *nods slowly* [br]

[br]

[br]

It stayed silent for a while... [br]

[br]

Blain: What's the deal between you and Zakhaev anyway...? It's not just because he's after you, is it...?

[br]

[br]

Scyth: No... No, it's way past personal... [br]

Blain: What happened...? [br]

[br]

Scyth: ... When I just got out of my cryogenic state, I found myself wandering through a destroyed city called Robotropolis... I didn't know what the hell happened in this world and I had to learn everything the hard way... I was captured a few times, interrogated, tortured, almost burned to death and looked death in the eyes a lot. It didn't took long for me to learn that the humans were the enemies and I tried to avoid them as much as possible as I just roamed the planet all alone, not knowing what to do. Then one day, as I was walking through another destroyed town, I found a human girl... She was around 12 years old when I found her, and at first, I ignored her and carried on... I heard her crying and sobbing between the ruined buildings... Then I turned around and looked at her... And she looked at me... And there was something about her... She was alone too, like me... So I took her with me... Vanessa was her name... And I took care of her ever since... And I saw her growing up over the years and we became really close... I taught her how to use weapons and how to defend herself, because Zakhaev was still after us with his men... It went good for a few years, even though we had really harsh times... But we managed... And then Zakhaev... [br]

[br]

It stayed silent for a while... Scyth sighed a lot... [br]

[br]

Blain: Then what...? [br]

Scyth: Well... One day, I failed to protect her... Zakhaev got her so that he could lure me out... I tried to save her, but I was too late... He shot her in front of my eyes... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... Ooh... Then what...? [br]

Scyth: I murdered out Zakhaev's entire family... [br]

Blain: ... [br]

Scyth: *nods slowly* [br]

Blain: I see... [br]

Scyth: And right now... When I think about it... When I look at you and hear the things you've been through... I'm beginning to think Robotnik was right... [br]

[br]

Blain: Robotnik...? Right about what...? [br]

Scyth: I found this note in my cryochamber when I got out of my state of suspended animation... I still

have it somewhere... Wait... [br]

[br]

He searches his pockets for a while until he got out a small note... He gave that to me and I started reading... [br]

[br]

"You shall travel through the darkest place"

[br]

"The life of the Shadows you shall embrace"[br]

"You shall be nothing more but a mere voice"[br]

"Everything you knew is gone, there is no more rejoice"[br]

"I am what you will be"[br]

"And shall stretch out from the clear sky all to the great Northern Sea"[br]

"Blinded are your eyes, deaf are your ears"[br]

"The only thing that you feel, is the decent of your tears"[br]

"Screaming out your agony, that no one hears"[br]

"You feel no pain, nor remorse"[br]

"You shall be banished from the Source"[br]

"Until the stars unite with the sun"[br]

"For sure, some day... You will have me undone..."[br]

[br]

It sends chills down my spine after I read it... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... Why'd he leave that note in you're cryochamber...? [br]

[br]

Scyth: I don't know... But what he basically wants to say is that every Lifeform is supposed to suffer...

The elements will take care of that, if not, the memories... Turns out Robotnik was more fracked up then he already was... [br]

[br]

Blain: Yeah...[br]

Scyth: ... So... What I'm trying to say is... You really are like a brother to me Blain... An older brother... And in some way, we are... I wish I had a life like you had... You know what it's like to have a family and someone that loves you the way you are... [br]

[br]

Blain: *nods* [br]

Scyth: But still... [br]

Blain: Yeah... I gotta admit though... [br]

Scyth: ... What...? [br]

Blain: I changed so much over the years to the point I didn't even recognized myself anymore... And eh...

It was a good thing... Everything was so different once the war was over for me... It was hard at first, but then she showed up... Like... I don't know... Like she was sent to look after me... Which she did... And she opened my eyes... She made me feel things I've never felt before and well... It was scary at first, you know... Until she made me realize that changes were in fact a good thing... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Yeah... [br]

Blain: But... The things that are happening outside for the past few months... It's so surreal... I used to take lives like it was nothing but... After being with her for more then 23 years made me realize that was a wrong thing to do... But I can't change it anymore... And now being in this mess... I still hold on to what

she believed in... To try to live in harmony with everyone and love everyone like you love yourself... But I can't do that for some reason even though I tried... And right now, I don't know who I am anymore... And now she's gone... [br]

[br]

Then it stayed silent after that... [br]

[br]

Scyth: ... Blain...? [br]

Blain: Hm...? [br]

Scyth: When this is all over... [br]

Blain: Yeah...? [br]

Scyth: Can I stay with you then...? [br]

Blain: ... Maybe... If my home is still there, which I doubt... [br]

Scyth: Where did you live...? [br]

Blain: Southwest, near a small town called Deberan... We had our own little village that... My friends and I established after the war. And we didn't move since...[br]

[br]

Scyth: ... Why didn't you move on to the big cities like everyone else...? [br]

[br]

Blain: Because... We had no reason to leave... I lived with Nicole in a small simple house that was located near a beautiful lake... And you could see the big green forests with the mountains... A beach was only 20 minutes walking from our house through the forests... And if you went in the opposite direction, you saw the big grass plains, with the soft hills... And every day if you woke up... You saw the sun coming up from behind the hills... And then the first thing I felt was her arm on my stomach with her head on my chest... I felt her warm breath... At times like that, I could stare at her for hours until she woke up... And... Then she would just look at me with a little smile as I lost myself in her eyes... I have no idea why she wanted to be with me... I never found out what she liked about me, but... I'm glad she did... [br]

[br]

Scyth: ... Yeah...[br]

[br]

And with that, Scyth got up and walked away in the dark corridors...[br]

[br]

For the past few months, nothing was really happening besides the things I experienced... Sure, 36 percent of all sentient life died on the planet during the nuclear holocaust... Not to mention the virus breakout... [br]

[br]

Two weeks passed by since then... We're hiding like rats in the dark, away from everything and watch how the world destroys itself. We're fighting a guerrilla war here where nothing makes sense. But there is a little spark of hope seen in the darkness. In the mean time, we went out numerous times to pick up survivors. On the way, during, and extraction the survivors were under harsh conditions. Most of the time, we encountered GUN troops and made sure they didn't follow us back to Azerbaijan. Sadly, no one familiar was with the group of survivors... But a part from the things that happened to us, everything went relatively smooth. We lost no one during the extraction of the survivors. But with everything you undertake and succeed without effort, it is inevitable that it would go wrong followed with every consequences available at some point. Thing will get complicated... And from my experience, when things get complicated, things go wrong... But still... I had faith that we could end the war... Scyth was the one who realized it first... Then me... Then slowly but steady, everyone started to believe... Then one night, we

realized our hopes were not in vain... After two weeks, Scyth received a message from Zakhaev that he was willing to sell Miller, head of GUN, out to us. Zakhaev had his own reasons to sell Miller out, but we didn't care. It was agreed on that Scyth and Zakhaev were meeting each other alone near an abandoned warehouse near the outskirts of an industrial terrain that was somewhat intact. But what Zakhaev didn't know was that Scyth will not be alone... Thirty former MNAF soldiers will be backing Scyth up, hid amongst the many ruins of the surroundings. We would take Miller and Zakhaev out, and after that, it was just a matter of sitting back and watch how the human regime would crumble without leadership. I believed it... Everyone else did too... The war would end that very same night... We all believed it... [br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

25 - Who is like you, who was and who will be...?

The day that Terry died was... I don't know... I can't describe it... No one could... We considered Terry to be a friend of ours... But under normal circumstances, it takes months to develop a tight friendship with anyone... But... That wasn't the case Terry... It was really painful when I saw him passing away... He saved me two times... And just his overall perky attitude that cheered me up whenever I needed it... We did something that others wouldn't approve... It was something that made me forget all the sorrows I was feeling for a short time... So if you asked me... "Was it a wrong thing to do...?" Then I'd say... No... I don't think it was... But it shouldn't have happened... I couldn't do that to Blain and Kaelyn... But then the doubts started... And I realized that I regret what I did with Terry even though I wasn't so sure about it... I didn't know... Was it because he made me forget the sorrows I had...? I really didn't know... But I regret it deep down inside of me... Not just for me, but also for Terry... And I often wondered why I did it and how different it would be if Terry wasn't there that particular night when we left the village... Maybe I wouldn't be alive anymore... Regrets...? Remorse...? It didn't mean anything to me ever since then... I stopped thinking about it... It's because I realized that everything can be over in just a blink of an eye... So I decided that I should do the right thing... To make sure that I will not have any more regrets... Because that truly is the most awful thing you can experience... It makes you feel powerless... It makes you want to change the decisions you made in the past in order to rectify your actions today. But you can't... And that's why I've decided not to tell Ceylan... It was a painful decision, but I had to... It was the best for both of us... She wouldn't probably take it the right way and I didn't wanna risk losing her... She'll be better off without me telling... And the only thing I could do was to try to rectify everything I ever did wrong... And to deal with it like everyone else... And the struggles I faced were hard... [br]

[br]

We buried Terry in a meadow not far outside the city when the sun was coming up... And the only way to deal with his death was to keep telling myself that he had peace... But that didn't mean I didn't cry over him... Not long after that, we had to go on... We couldn't stay, not after what happened that dreadful night... And no one said anything as we were walking... No more jokes... No more laughing... Just the sounds of footsteps in the mud... There was this empty void that no one could fill up... And everyone noticed it...[br]

[br]

The road was long and exhausting... Everything went rather slow since no one escaped unharmed... Lattei had a black eye and everyone else had cuts and bruises all over their bodies. It hurt... In the distance, you could hear thunder as the dark and grey clouds assembled above us, spreading out over a wide area... Then the first raindrops fell... Soon, the clouds would open up and soaked us with their water... But we had to keep on moving... On the way, we saw two humans beating each other to death... They were fighting about something, but we didn't really know about what. We walked by slowly and tried our best to stay unnoticed. Luckily, they didn't even notice us because they were too busy with fighting... As we got closer, we could see they were fighting over food they found... Then a third guy came, shot the other two, and took it... He takes a bite of an apple, chews, spits it out and throws the rest of it away as we kept walking on like nothing ever happened... [br]

[br]

Many hours later, we arrived at a very small village... Most of the houses were blown up, or was shattered to pieces, but there were a few buildings left fairly intact... And we entered a very old large building that a cross in front of it... As soon as we entered the building, it was fairly dark, but you could still see everything... It had a lot of benches, chandeliers, large windows in lead, and all sorts of stuff were carved out in the walls. To the left, it was filled with a lot of pipes, ranging from small ones, to very large ones. At the end, there was some sort of podium... And there was a guy hanging on a cross behind it... I had no idea what this place was... But it was amazing... I've never seen anything like it before... There was something about this place while we could hear the rain and thunder outside... I sat down on a bench with my feet up to support my head on my knees and was captivated by everything I saw... I was still soaked and tired, but luckily, it was nice and warm inside...[br]

[br]

I must have dozed off a little when I felt someone gently shaking my shoulders... As I opened my eyes slowly, I saw it was Ceylan... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: There you are... I've been looking for you... [br]

Nicole: Where are the others...? [br]

Ceylan: Their taking care of each others cuts and bruises... You should do the same... [br]

Nicole: *shakes no* [br]

Ceylan: Hm...? Why not...? [br]

Nicole: It'll heal...[br]

Ceylan: No, its not gonna heal if it's open like that... It might get infected... [br]

Nicole: No, really... I'm fine... [br]

Ceylan: Come on, don't be silly... [br]

[br]

She gets out a bandage and a bottle of water. She soaked the bandage with water and started to clean my face a bit... The wounds didn't really heal that good, and there was still blood on the bandage as she removed it... It did sting a lot, and every time she placed the bandage soaked with ice cold water on a cut, I gasped because of the stings I felt. After she was done cleaning my face, she looked at me... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: You have to take off you're sweater... [br]

Nicole: ... No, it's fine... Really... [br]

Ceylan: I can see blood seeping through, Nic... Come on, don't be so stubborn... [br]

[br]

Before I could protest, she took off my sweater... And eh... I wasn't really comfortable with it sitting half naked in front of her... Two days ago, I wish she would have done that but... It feels different now... Maybe it was because I decided to not to tell how I feel about her... I still had feelings for her but... It's not the same... I wish it was, but it wasn't... I looked down on her while she was taking care of the cuts I had on my stomach and chest... I didn't know how I got it... But her gentle moves and soft fluffy paws made the pain go away... I didn't realize it, but I was crying... I didn't know why I was crying... Maybe I was crying over Terry... Maybe I was crying because I realized she would never love me in the way I meant it to be... Or... Maybe I was crying over both... Then she looked up to me and placed her paw on my cheek and I closed my eyes ... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: Ssh... It's ok, Nic... Everything is gonna be alright now, ok...? [br]

Nicole: *nods*[br]

[br]

Then she got up and walked away... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Ceylan...? [br]

[br]

She stopped and turned to me... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: Yeah...? [br]

Nicole: ... Do... Do you believe everything is gonna be alright or... Did someone told you to believe that...?[br]

[br]

Ceylan: Terry believed it... So why shouldn't we...? [br]

Nicole: *nods slowly* [br]

[br]

I never saw Ceylan crying ever since I knew her. And she wasn't crying now... I knew Terry was a good friend of Ceylan, but even so, she didn't cry... But as she turned her back to me and walked away again, I could swear I saw her wiping her eyes... [br]

[br]

I tried to sleep... But I was afraid to... As soon as I closed my eyes, everything started to come back... I tried to stay awake for as long as possible as I was lying on a bench... It was uncomfortable, but its better then to sleep on the ground... I heard everyone else sleeping, and the longer I listened, the louder it became... The seconds, the minutes, the hours crawled away until exhaustion took over and I fell asleep... But I was scared... [br]

[br]

As soon as I woke up, I felt the nice warm sun shining on my face... I focused my eyes to get a better vision... No longer was I in the building... Huge open grass plains, surrounded by the big forest like it was back home... There wasn't a living soul I encountered as I walked, and I even walked by the lake... As I bent over to see my own reflection, I saw I was young again... As I kneeled down to feel the water, I felt a really sharp pain in my right arm which was touching the water... I noticed the water turning dark red as the sharp pain kept on getting worse... And when I looked down on my arm, I noticed my wrist had a deep cut where a lot of blood was flowing out... I quickly removed my hand out of the water, but the cut didn't disappear... The sky, the ground... The trees, the grass...The sun... It was all turning blood red as the shadows became pitch black... But then I felt a hand on my shoulder... And when I turned around, I saw it was Cody... He looked at me with that little smile he always had... And I told him how much I missed, and how much I loved and cared him, which is something I rarely did... But I had to say it... Then I grabbed his hand and noticed it was severely burned... It was all pink and black as the smell of burned flesh entered my nostrils... I was so startled by that, I let go of his hand... But I looked at him, still same old Cody with that smile... I saw how his face slowly burned to the point it was black and pink as he strokes my cheek and told me he loved me... [br]

[br]

I opened my eyes and heard the wind waving through the cold dark night as I stared outside the high window. It seemed as if time didn't pass on while I was asleep... I felt cold and was shivering on the wooden bench. It wasn't really that comfortable to sleep on but it was better then nothing. I curled up, trying to warm myself but that didn't really help... [br]

[br]

The moon shined its light inside the building, where it was poorly illuminated... For some reason, I wasn't scared, unlike the university where were before... There was something about this place that made me comfortable and safe... And I still didn't know what this place was... I couldn't figure it out. It

wasn't a house, no doubt about it. Maybe it was a community building or something, like a party center. But that wouldn't explain all those chandeliers and the big wooden cross with some guy nailed to it... It didn't really seem "party worthy"... As I looked at the huge wooden cross, I saw a small light in the distance, near that cross. Then one light was lit as the other got turned off... And more little lights were turned on... There was something about it that made me curious... So I got up and slowly walked towards it... Then I thought... What if it were intruders again like last time...? A scary thought... I carefully got my hands on a large candle stand and walked slowly towards it...[br]

As soon as I got closer, I noticed a human posture kneeling in front, surrounded by a few candles in front of her on a stand... When I got close enough, I noticed that it was an old woman... She had her eyes closed and mumbled something but I couldn't hear what she was saying... So I let the candle stand I was holding down slowly, but I accidentally knocked something over... And the old woman quickly turned around and looked startled at me... [br]

[br]

Old woman: No, please... [br]

Nicole: Who are you...? [br]

[br]

She looked surprised to say the least when she heard my voice... [br]

[br]

Old woman: Please... Lower your rifle... I mean no harm... [br]

[br]

Rifle...? I looked at the candle stand and she thought I was holding on to a rifle... Then I slowly got out of the darkness and showed myself to her... She looked really old... [br]

[br]

Nicole: It's not a rifle... I mean no harm either... [br]

Old woman: A-Are you alone...? [br]

Nicole: ... No... No, I'm not... [br]

Old woman: Oh... .. Maybe... Maybe it's best for me to move along then... [br]

Nicole: Why is that...? [br]

Old woman: I know furies do not appreciate human companionship... So... I'll... I'll be off then... [br]

[br]

She tried to get up from her kneeled position, but she had trouble to get up... So I helped her getting up... She looked at me for a short moment and smiled weakly, and then she walked off... But I noticed that she had a lot of trouble with walking too... [br]

[br]

Nicole: No wait... Stay... Please stay, at least for the night... It's way too dark to go outside now... And besides... You'll be safe with us... [br]

[br]

Old woman: Who could possibly want to hurt me...? [br]

[br]

Nicole: I don't know but... Please, stay... It's not safe out there... [br]

Old woman: Alright then..... Thank you..... [br]

Nicole: It's ok... [br]

[br]

So we both sat down on a wooden bench, and I stayed with her, keeping her company, seeing as I wasn't tired... It stayed silent for a long time... But there was one question that I've wanted to ask her...[br]

[br]

Nicole: Miss...? Can I ask you something...? [br]

Old woman: What is it, dear...? [br]

Nicole: ... Do you know what kind of a place this is...? [br]

Old woman: It's a church... [br]

Nicole: So... This is how a church looks like...? [br]

Old woman: *nods* [br]

Nicole: Oh whoa... [br]

Old woman: You've never been into one, have you...? [br]

Nicole: No... I only saw it on pictures and I've heard of it... [br]

Old woman: I see... [br]

[br]

Then it stayed silent for a long time... [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... So... Who's the guy on the cross...? Is it some kind of symbol...? [br]

Old woman: That...? That would be Jesus Christ, the Son of God... He died for the sins of humanity... [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... What...? [br]

Old woman: It is a complicated religion, dear... People say that God and Jesus are up there, in the sky, judging the world and mankind for their sins... But... I don't believe that... God is not up there, or here... He's in your heart... But people these days... They banned Him out of their hearts... But I guess even the most stubborn atheists need hope in times like these... [br]

[br]

Nicole: I see... [br]

[br]

Then it stayed silent for a long time again... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Can I ask what your name is...? [br]

Old woman: Ah... Names... It's not relevant to know my name, dear... I'm just an old woman, languishing away, waiting for the day that I pass away... And I can only hope that it will be soon... [br]

[br]

Nicole: But... Aren't you afraid...? [br]

Old woman: No... [br]

Nicole: ... Why not...? [br]

Old woman: Is there a reason to be afraid...? [br]

Nicole: No... I... I don't know... [br]

[br]

Old woman: Jesus had to suffer in order to save mankind... And it's the same with his followers... As long as there has been good and evil, people have suffered... But those who kept hope and believe 'till the end, will be saved... [br]

[br]

Nicole: How...? [br]

Old woman: He takes you away from this world... [br]

Nicole: So He makes you die...? [br]

Old woman: *nods* [br]

Nicole: ... Isn't that a little... Drastic...? [br]

Old woman: No... Death isn't a punishment dear... It's salvation... Dieing is the day where you start

living... And that's why I'm not afraid... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Ooh... [br]

Old woman: Heh... It's actually a silly thing... [br]

Nicole: What is...? [br]

Old woman: My life started here, 73 years ago, at this exact same place... And here it shall end... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Ooh... [br]

Old woman: *nods* [br]

Nicole: ... But... If God sees everything what's happening here, how come he doesn't do anything...? [br]

[br]

Old woman: God is a being we can not comprehend... It pains Him to see humans like that... But humans need to realize that their taking the wrong actions... God gave them a heart, but most don't do anything with it... Their blinded by materialism and greed... [br]

[br]

Nicole: I see... [br]

Old woman: And most people who do believe... Their hypocrites... Shouting out that they believe in order to get worshipped by humans... You shouldn't get worshipped by humans... You worship Him... Those who are praised shall be humiliated, but those who are humiliated, shall be praised... What is there for everyone to see shall be hidden, and what is hidden shall be there for everyone to see... It's better to remain silent, then to speak... [br]

[br]

Nicole: *nods* [br]

[br]

Then it stayed silent for a while again... [br]

[br]

Nicole: So... Why were you kneeling, if you don't mind me asking...? [br]

Old woman: I was talking to Him... [br]

Nicole: ... Praying...? [br]

Old woman: Yes... [br]

Nicole: For what...? [br]

Old woman: That it will be over soon... I've seen my entire family dieing... And I can only pray and beg to Him to take me away from this world and let me be with my family again... That's all I ever crave for... [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... What about me...? And... Everyone else who died...? [br]

Old woman: Ignorance is bliss my dear... And now that you know, don't be afraid to ask... Nothing is impossible for Him... For the first life will pass away and you will be reborn in the eternal life... And there will be no more sorrow, as He wipes your tears away... [br]

[br]

The old woman was full of wisdom... At least, that's how I experienced it... What I think was, is that she meant everything in symbolic terms... I didn't know if there really was someone out there that did all these things she claimed but... It did made sense for some reason... And she was right... It gave people hope to cling on to an idea that they will be taken away from this world... [br]

[br]

She fell asleep after a long time talking to her... The poor woman was exhausted... So was I... But I didn't fell asleep once I got on a bench again... No... Instead, it got me thinking about everything she said... That nothing is impossible for Him... And I wanted to ask Him... But... How do you talk to someone

you don't see...? As I kept on thinking, I thought about Blain and Terry, about Sonic and everyone else... My little brother Cody... I kept on asking if I get to see them one day, and if he would take good care of them... I asked if I could be with them again... Nothing was said out loud... Just gentle whispers... At some point, I felt how the tears were rolling down my face as I kept on asking and asking... He never answered me once that night... And that's how I fell asleep... Feeling nothing but cold, sorrow and loneliness... And yet comforted... [br]

[br]

The next day, when I woke up, I noticed that woman was still sitting on a bench... As I approached her and shook her shoulders, she didn't react... I took a good look at her face and felt her cold hand... It looked as if she was sleeping peaceful, and never wake up again... I was shocked at first but then I remembered what she said and asked... And I guess there was someone out there after all... [br]

26 - The deal...

Nicole: Come on!! Step on it!! You're getting soaked!! [br]

Blain: Hold up!! [br]

Nicole: You're lagging!! Haha!! [br]

Blain: What's the point in running if we're already soaked?!![br]

Nicole: I have no idea!! Just keep on running!! Whoooo!! [br]

Blain: I'm actually beginning to think the rain is starting to get nice if it keeps on going like this!! [br]
[br]

Nicole: I haven't seen it raining like this for years!! [br]

Blain: I've never seen it raining like this at all!! [br]

Nicole: We can take shelter in that tree over there!! Come on!! Jump up!! [br]

Blain: I can't jump that high!! [br]

Nicole: I'll jump first and give you a hand!! [br]

Blain: Ok!! Just hurry up!! [br]

Nicole: Reach it!! Yeah!! There you go!! Haha!! [br]

Blain: Whoa!! [br]

Nicole: Don't slip!! [br]

Blain: The tree isn't doing any good, you know!! I'm still getting soaked!! [br]

Nicole: Then sit over here! It's dryer![br]

[br]

Blain: Hehe... [br]

Nicole: *smiles* [br]

Blain: *smiles back*[br]

Nicole: It might take a while before the rain stops you know... [br]

Blain: Yeah... [br]

Nicole: Hehe... [br]

Blain: Well, I don't really mind... [br]

Nicole: What, being soaked...? [br]

Blain: Yeah... [br]

Nicole: Why is that...? *smiles* [br]

Blain: Because I'm here with you... [br]

Nicole: Aww... You can be really sweet some times, you know that...? [br]

Blain: Thanks... I guess, hehe... [br]

Nicole: You know... [br]

Blain: What...? [br]

Nicole: I know you only for like a year now but... It feels so much longer then that...[br]

Blain: Yeah... Did you ever think of how it turned out like this...? Because I never imagined I'd be with you...[br]

[br]

Nicole: No... But I'm not complaining... I got everything I want right here in my arms... That's all I ever

needed... [br]

[br]

Blain: Same here... [br]

Nicole: Blain...? [br]

Blain: Yeah...? [br]

Nicole: ... Can I kiss you...? [br]

Blain: You still need to ask...? *smiles* [br]

Nicole: Naaah... [br]

Blain: Hehehe... [br]

Nicole: Pucker up, pincushion! [br]

Blain: Whoa, whoa, whoa!! [br]

Nicole: Whoa!![br]

Blain: *lifts Nicole back up the branch* Don't slip... [br]

Nicole: Eh... Hehe... Let's just forget that happened... [br]

Blain: ... No... *kisses Nicole* [br]

Nicole: *kisses Blain* [br]

Blain: Maybe I could use a laugh... [br]

Nicole: ... [br]

Blain: Hehehe... *gets pushed of the branched* Whoa!!! [br]

Nicole: Maybe I could use a laugh too! Whaha! Come on... *reaches out hand* [br]

Blain: *climbs in the tree again* [br]

Nicole: I'm sorry... Hehehe... *kisses Blain again*[br]

Blain: *smiles*[br]

[br]

That was one of the many memories I had with Nicole... Every now and then, my eyes closed and I could picture everything again of how things used to be with her. I've been thinking about her for hours in bed, trying to catch any sleep. The difficult things to remember was her voice whenever she was comforting me... Whenever I had a serious conversation with her, she always talked quietly... It's something I can't really explain... You gotta hear it to understand... She never looked you in the eyes when you were having a serious conversation with her... But she always managed to say the right things to make you feel better... And I had the feeling I had the same with her... It made me wish she was here right now, so that I could tell her everything I ever wanted to tell her... I never had the guts to speak up, but she knew I loved her... [br]

[br]

Blain: You often think about the future Nicole?[br]

Nicole: Nope... I'll just live every day like it's my last and not worry about the next, because the next day has its own worries...[br]

[br]

Blain: Yeah but, don't you think about how you'll end up in ten years, or even twenty years, or... Maybe even in thirty years...?[br]

[br]

Nicole: Of course I do...[br]

Blain: Really...?[br]

Nicole: Yeah... I know I'll be old. I might have a kid... Maybe even two... I might even be married even though I can't really imagine that...[br]

[br]

Blain: But what if those things are never to be realized...?[br]

Nicole: How would you know...?[br]

Blain: Well...[br]

Nicole: How do you know that it's not gonna be realized...?[br]

Blain: ...[br]

Nicole: Exactly... Maybe it doesn't go the way I planned... Maybe there are lots of things that are not gonna be realized in 30 years... Hell, maybe I'm dead in thirty years... But I know that at least one thing will be realized...[br]

[br]

Blain: Which is...?[br]

[br]

Nicole: I don't know... That's the point... Maybe I'm way different in thirty years... I bet you never thought you would end up like this with me on a porch talking about the future... I guess that indicates how much you changed over the years...[br]

[br]

Blain: Yeah... I never imagined that...[br]

Nicole: Hehe...[br]

[br]

That conversation was the one I remembered the most... And she was right... Everything she said was true... If I knew back then of the things happening now, I would have made different choices in the past... I wish she was here... Even if it was for just five minutes... I wanted to see her, hear her, feel her... To touch her long hair and feel her soft fur... To tell her everything I ever wanted to say to her... Maybe she could hear my soft crying over her... Maybe she knew I missed her a lot, and that a part of me died with her... What am I going to do after the war is over without her...? I'm thirty nine years old now... The Chaos Drive that keeps me alive only works for another thirty eight years... I cant live that long without her... I need her more then anything else... And every time I realized that she's not coming back, I felt loneliness... Like her... She was scared to be alone as much as I hated to be alone... And over the months, I found out and that's why we became dependent on each other... I'll see her again one day, along with everyone else I lost over the years... But not yet... Not just yet... [br]

[br]

Tomorrow night would be the night that the war ends. Maybe that was the reason why I couldn't sleep. Besides thinking of Nicole all the time, I also thought what to do after everything ended... I would have to start all over again... And it wasn't something I was thrilled to do... It was a difficult time back then and I don't want to experience it again... [br]

[br]

The next day, I wasn't really myself for some reason... I had to stay sharp and alert because tonight was the night that everything would end. Nothing should go wrong. I sat at a table, nervously twiddling a pen through my fingers. I nervously jumped up immediately when I felt a hand on my shoulder... [br]

[br]

Blain: Shifty?! [br]

Shifty: Hello sarge... [br]

Blain: It's good to see you again! [br]

Shifty: Yeah, likewise, sir! With all due respect, but you've become a nervewreck... [br]

Tavish: Hell, you can expect the same reaction from me if I saw your face... [br]

Shifty: Piss off, I just got out of the sickbay, gimme a break here. [br]

Blain: You just got out...? [br]

Shifty: Yeah... I missed a lot of action. And I hear everyone saying the war is gonna end tonight, so I guess no action for me. [br]

[br]

Blain: Well I hope so... What's the plan then? [br]

Shifty: Jarod shows me around and introduce me to the new guys and- Helloooooo... [br]

[br]

I turned around and noticed Vilani standing behind me... [br]

[br]

Vilani: Eh... Hi. [br]

Shifty: And who is this fiiiiiiiiiiiiine looking feline?[br]

Jarod: ... That would be your commanding officer. [br]

Vilani: MNAD Second Flight Lieutenant Vilani. [br]

Shifty: ... No shoot...? [br]

Vilani: ... No shoot... The stripes don't lie. Stand in attention when I'm talking to you. [br]

Shifty: Yes ma'am! *salutes* [br]

Vilani: What you just said is considered to be an offensive against a superior officer. State your rank, name and regiment. [br]

[br]

Shifty: Private Shifty, 506th regiment, ma'am! [br]

Vilani: You haven't heard the last of me, private Shifty. Continue as you were. [br]

[br]

Vilani kept on having a serious expression when she walked away... And as she walked passed Jarod and me, I noticed she had trouble holding her laughter. Then we all just laughed at Shifty...

[br]

[br]

Shifty: What?! You could have said it sooner that she was a lieutenant!! [br]

Jarod: Dude, she's messing with you! *laughs* [br]

Shifty: ... You sure? [br]

Jarod: Yeah!! *laughs* [br]

Shifty: frack, dude! I almost shat my pants here!![br]

[br]

Then we laughed even louder... [br]

[br]

A few hours passed by while Jarod, Shifty, Tavish and me sat around the table, informing Shifty of everything. He was really stunned by the things he we told him, and even though nothing really made sense, it does shed a light on certain things... [br]

[br]

Shifty: So where's Rico...? [br]

Tavish: Rico is out in the field with Regan as a medical advisor. They've been gone for two weeks now.

[br]

[br]

Blain: Yeah. They keep having contact every few hours to let us know of their situation. Also, unmanned aerial flight is available to them, so no worries. [br]

[br]

Shifty: *nods* [br]

[br]

Then it stayed silent for a while again... [br]

[br]

Shifty: How come everyone knows for sure that the war will end tonight...? [br]

Tavish: Because, Scyth is send in there alone to keep to the bargain. After a positive ID on Miller, he takes Miller out as we take out Zakhaev. Then the most important political bastards are out of the way, and we watch how the human regime will rumble... [br]

[br]

Shifty: You so sure about it...? [br]

Blain: Well the government is based a Junta one... If the military hierarchs collapse like a house of card, it'll be all over soon. [br]

[br]

Shifty: ... Yeah... I guess... [br]

[br]

It stayed silent again for a while... I guess everyone was a little tired of the things happening for the last few weeks and this was our first time we get to relax a bit. But then again, we were bored a hell and tonight we would get to see action. No one was really nervous but just... Bored... I kept on chewing on bubblegum as Tavish was chewing on a toothpick. Shifty kept on making irritating sounds as Jarod just stared blankly into space. After I followed his eye movements for a while, I noticed he kept on staring at Vilani, who was... Doing something I didn't know. She kept on walking around and talked to people... And at some point, everyone noticed Jarod was staring at Vilani... [br]

[br]

Shifty: You like her, don't you? [br]

Jarod: Yeah- I mean- [br]

Shifty: Dude... [br]

Jarod: What? [br]

Shifty: Just go and talk to her, you know... [br]

Jarod: Yeah but... [br]

Shifty: But what? [br]

Jarod: I don't really think it's such a good idea... I mean-[br]

Shifty: Bullshoot, remember back in college?! You could have every girl you wanted with your smooth talks and shoot! Remember those twins?! [br]

[br]

Jarod: Yeah, thanks for reminding me... [br]

Shifty: Come on dude, don't be such a pussy. No pun intended... [br]

[br]

Jarod: This is different, man... I mean... shoot... Look at her... [br]

Shifty: Yeah so!?! [br]

Tavish: Oh for frack's sakes, Jarod, just go to her already, will you?! [br]

Shifty: See?! Tavish agrees with me! [br]

Tavish: I only said that to make you shut up. [br]

Jarod: *sighs* [br]

Blain: What's the problem? You talked to her before. [br]

Jarod: *sighs* Alright, alright... I'll go...[br]

Shifty: Great! Finally! [br]

Tavish: And whatever you do, don't mention you're genital wards![br]

Jarod: Man, frack you... [br]

Tavish: Whaha!! [br]

[br]

Then Jarod got up and walked towards Vilani. As soon as he reached her, he looked back at us, and we embarrassed Jarod by having big grins on our faces and putting our thumbs up. And as we looked at Vilani, she had a smile on her face as she was looking at us again... [br]

[br]

Vilani: Hey, wassup Jarod? [br]

Jarod: Hey, Vilani... I eh... I was wondering... [br]

[br]

Then he stopped talking and looked at us again, and we did the same thing... Grinning and putting our thumbs up as Vilani looked at us and tried to hold back her laughter... Poor Jarod... That guy was frackng nervous...[br]

[br]

Vilani: ... Wondering what...? [br]

Jarod: Eh... How'd you manage to keep that shirt so white? [br]

Vilani: ... Wash it at forty degrees with a fabric softener... **[br]**

Jarod: *nods nervously* Alright, thanks. [br]

Vilani: Is that what you wanted to ask? *smiles* [br]

Jarod: Yes! ... Pretty much... [br]

Vilani: Alright then... [br]

[br]

Then he turned around and walked back towards us while his head was red as a tomato. We all laughed, but Shifty laughed the loudest of us all... [br]

[br]

Shifty: Holy shoot!! Dude!! That's gotta be the shoottiest opening line I've ever heard!! Holy frack!!

laughs [br]

[br]

Jarod: *sighs* [br]

Shifty: No! Seriously!! This is a serious issue!! You lost your touch, dude!! What the hell?! [br]

Tavish: Don't worry. I know what you should do. Here, take this. [br]

[br]

Tavish gave Jarod a radio earpiece... [br]

[br]

Jarod: Where the hell did you get that? [br]

Tavish: From my helmet. [br]

Jarod: What the hell?! You busted MY helmet?! [br]

Tavish: Stop doging, it's removable and you can use it as invisible earpiece. [br]

Jarod: Yeah but did you need to take my helmet!?! [br]

Tavish: Yes, seeing it's still my helmet. [br]

Jarod: That because I took your helmet after you frackng puked in it!! [br]

Tavish: Hey, want us to help you or not? [br]

[br]

[br]

Shifty: What?!! Tavish puked in you're helmet?!! Oh man, this is frackng priceless!! What else did I miss while I was away?!! *laughs*[br]

[br]

Jarod: Right... Ok... [br]

Tavish: Take this earpiece and we'll talk you through. Don't worry. [br]

[br]

After Jarod placed that earpiece reluctantly in his ear and walked off to Vilani again, Tavish got a big grin on his face... [br]

[br]

Tavish: Who's up for some fun...? *grins* [br]

Shifty: Oh dude... You can't be serious... [br]

Tavish: *keeps on grinning* [br]

Shifty: *laughs* Oh man... Respect!! *slaps fist again Tavish' fist* [br]

[br]

Shifty: *grabs radio* Alright Jarod, listen up. As soon as you approach her, walk how you normally do.

[br]

[br]

Shifty: He's walking as if he has a chicken shoved up his @\$\$....!! This is fracking epic...! *laughs* [br]

[br]

We couldn't resist not laughing to see how he was walking towards Vilani... He tried to stay relaxed as possible, but it still showed of how nervous he was just to talk to her... Poor Jarod, he must really like her to make such an @\$ out of himself... [br]

[br]

Jarod: Vilani...? [br]

Vilani: Hey Jarod, back so soon?! Wanna know how I keep my pants in this shade of blue? *smiles* [br]

[br]

Jarod: No... Eh... [br]

[br]

Tavish: Alright... Just say how much you like her... [br]

[br]

Jarod: I know you for a few weeks now and I really like you... And... I was wondering... [br]

[br]

Shifty: *grabs radio from Tavish and puts up a deep voice* "Vilani... There's more to you... Than meets the eye..." [br]

[br]

Tavish/Shifty/Blain: *laughs* [br]

[br]

Vilani: ... Wassup...? Just tell me... *smiles*[br]

Jarod: Eh...[br]

[br]

Shifty: *puts up retarded voice* "Ah wanna shove mah dokey up you're cha-chaaaaa...!"[br]

[br]

Tavish/Shifty/Blain: *laughs* [br]

[br]

Shifty: *grabs radio from Shifty* No, no, no! Ignore that! What Shifty is trying to tell you is... "Vilani, you're hot! You take it up the butt?!" *laughs* [br]

[br]

Shifty/Blain: *laughs* [br]

[br]

We were seriously dieing of laughing and to see Jarod's reaction to everything Shifty and Tavish were saying through the radio. Although I gotta admit, I was feeling a bit sorry for Jarod, seeing as I know what's like to speak up to someone you really like... Then at that moment, Jarod took

out the earpiece... [br]

[br]

Jarod: Vilani, under normal circumstances I would love to ask you for dinner and a movie but... Seeing the current situation, I can only offer you cookie crumbs and a crossword puzzle... [br]

[br]

Vilani: Was that so hard...? *smiles*[br]

[br]

Jarod: As a matter of fact, it is, seeing as those two idiots are trying to help. Hehehe... [br]

Vilani: How about we ditch the cookie crumbs and the crossword puzzle and go somewhere to talk instead...? Well... If you want... [br]

[br]

Jarod: Yeah... Sure! ... Where do you wanna go then...? We can't go outside... [br]

Vilani: *shows keycard of the flightdeck hangar* [br]

Jarod: You serious...? [br]

Vilani: Yup... You can even sit in the cockpit of the gunship if you like... [br]

Jarod: Sweet... [br]

[br]

Then we saw Vilani and Jarod walking away together... [br]

[br]

Shifty: Whooo!! He did it!! Hell yeah!! Mah boi is back!! Respect!! [br]

Jarod: *grins and puts up the middle finger*[br]

[br]

When evening fell, I went to look for Scyth. I haven't seen him all day and was wondering where he could be. And when I finally found him, I noticed he was in a room, sitting on his bed, staring blankly in front of him as all sorts of high tech gadgets were spread out on his bed. The door was open and I knocked, but he didn't respond, not even when I called his name. I walked towards him and nudged his shoulder. He quickly turned his head and I could see he had been crying... [br]

[br]

Blain: Hey, you ok...? [br]

Scyth: *shakes no* [br]

Blain: What's wrong...? [br]

Scyth: I'm fracking nervous Blain... Zakhaev isn't a guy you should be messing with, especially when you're attempting to kill him...[br]

[br]

Blain: Hey... Don't worry, we got your back, ok...? Thirty of us who got you're back... You got nothing to worry... [br]

[br]

Scyth: *nods*[br]

Blain: We're gonna end it... Tonight... Hoo-ah...? [br]

Scyth: Hoo-ah... [br]

[br]

I looked at him and then walked away... [br]

[br]

Half an hour later, everyone who was going with us prepared to go. Scyth wouldn't carry any weapons otherwise Zakhaev might suspect something. Instead, Scyth has a tracker ID that he has to place somewhere on Zakhaev in the event that something went wrong. Also, he had

another gadget that resembled some sort of tracker to see if the guy Zakhaev was gonna deliver to us really was Miller. An earpiece is placed deep inside of his ear to keep him up-to-date on what we see, and from the outside, it's invisible. We carried a lot of weapons and we should be fine... Nothing could go wrong... [br]

[br]

Then not long after that, we headed towards the abandoned warehouse on an industrial terrain 43 miles south west of Azerbaijan. We walked towards it, and tried to stay low encase there some scouts. Luckily, we had a UAV at our disposal, and no enemy activities could be seen... At around 10 o'clock in the evening, we arrived as everyone took positions among the ruined buildings and surroundings... And we basically just blend in with our environments. Before Scyth moved a few hundred meters away from us, I pushed a packet of smokes in his hands. We still had to wait 2 hours before Zakhaev would arrive, seeing as they would meet at midnight...[br]

[br]

One hour passed by... Two hours... Three... Still no sign of Zakhaev... Four hours... [br]

[br]

Radio: Heads up, UAV shows that 4 units are closing in on our perimeter, stay sharp. [br]

Blain: Scyth, 4 humans are closing in on you. Keep you're eyes peeled we got your back. Put up your thumb if you got my message. [br]

[br]

Then Scyth put his thumb... I could see Scyth was shaking a bit because he was so nervous...[br]

[br]

Blain: Alright... Good luck, Scyth... [br]

[br]

Then finally, we could see in the distance that Zakhaev showed up along with two armed soldiers with a guy walking in the middle who had a black bag shoved over his head... Once Scyth noticed them, he wasn't shaking anymore as he flicked his cigarette away... [br]

[br]

Scyth: You're late... [br]

Zakhaev: Yeah, well, ran into some trouble... [br]

Scyth: Nice place you picked... [br]

Zakhaev: Yeah, and you're actually alone and unarmed. I wouldn't expect that from you. [br]

Scyth: I didn't expect that from myself either... So... That's him...? [br]

Zakhaev: Yup... *lights up cigarette* [br]

[br]

Scyth: Tell you're guys to back off. [br]

[br]

Zakhaev nodded to the soldiers to step aside as Scyth yanked off the black bag shoved over the person's head... Scyth examines him for a moment... The head of that human looks all battered and bloody... [br]

[br]

Scyth: That's Miller alright... [br]

Zakhaev: I never rat out on someone... Not even you... [br]

Miller: Zakhaev, you backstabbing country matters... [br]

Zakhaev: *grins* It's just business, nothing personal. You still owe me a paycheck. [br]

Miller: frack you... [br]

Zakhaev: Yeah, you're right. frack the paycheck. I'll let you have the honour, Scyth. [br]

Scyth: ... [br]

Zakhaev: You can even use my gun. *reaches gun to Scyth* [br]

[br]

Jarod: For being sworn enemies, he sure is friendly towards Scyth... [br]

Blain: Yeah... That crossed my mind as well... Something's wrong... [br]

Jarod: Yeah, I think Scyth realized that too... [br]

Blain: No signs of any other hostiles though... [br]

Jarod: Zakhaev's up to something... I don't trust this... [br]

[br]

Zakhaev: Come on then... Shoot him... [br]

[br]

After hesitating for a moment, Scyth pressed the gun against Miller's head and shot him... Then

Miller dropped dead on the ground... [br]

[br]

Jarod: Engage...? [br]

Blain: No... Wait for Scyth's signal... [br]

[br]

Then Scyth lowered the gun and looked at Zakhaev... [br]

[br]

Zakhaev: *shrugs* A deal is a deal... Right...? [br]

Scyth: Yeah... This little deal doesn't mean we're best friends now... [br]

Zakhaev: I wouldn't expect otherwise from you... Look at you're stomach... [br]

[br]

And as Scyth looked down, we noticed a lasersight going on and off on his stomach... Then the

lasersight moved up to his head... Scyth looked really scared... [br]

[br]

Scyth: You fracking rat... [br]

Zakhaev: No, like I said, I'm don't rat anyone out. Guaranteeing your safety wasn't part of the deal...

So... Can I have my gun back please...? [br]

[br]

Scyth: ... *throws gun towards Zakhaev* [br]

[br]

At that point, we started to worry and already started making a plan on how to get him out... But then, we noticed something from the sky... Something came out of nowhere, as the front of a gigantic Titan was seen... Everyone who were hiding gawped at the massive floating object in the sky, knowing we wouldn't stand a chance if we wanted to try and save Scyth... Then the whole Titan was visible... [br]

[br]

Jarod: fracking hell... Active camo... [br]

Blain: No wonder we didn't see anything on the UAV... [br]

[br]

I saw how Zakhaev punched Scyth to the ground and kept on beating him in the face... Then he kneeled down next to Scyth who tried crawling away... [br]

[br]

Zakhaev: The only reason why I'm not putting a bullet through your head is because I want some info from you... I will beat EVERYTHING out of you... And I promise you... I will bust you up... *spits on Scyth*

Take him away. [br]

[br]

Scyth: **whispers** B-Blain.....? [br]

[br]

One of the soldiers violently pressed his knee between Scyth's shoulders as he cuffed him... And we couldn't do anything... We watched how Scyth got carried away and we waited for the Titan to leave... When it did, we made our retreat... But we'll get him out... I just hope that Scyth doesn't snitch on us, knowing what humans would do to get information they desired the most...

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

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[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

27 - No one...

Two weeks passed by since that day... And the situation didn't get any better the day we left the church... It only got worse... Temperatures dropped... The days became shorter... The nights were long and freezing and you could see the whole "road trip" idea that Terry considered it to be was fading away as each new day, we were confronted with the harsh truth... The deserted towns that were littered with dead bodies, burning ruins and mangled wrecks were seen every day. It got me wondering how this massive war "exploded" so all of a sudden, leaving millions of casualties in just a few months... And more importantly, why...? [br]

[br]

For more then 13 days, we walked through the blistering cold, while we didn't find any shelter. The nights were even worse... We passed by towns that were completely in ruins and not a single building was left standing... Then at some point, the towns stopped coming and there was only grass open plains with forests...[br]

[br]

The nights we slept in the open weren't that pleasant... Sure, it was beautiful to see the snow on the trees at night, but sleeping... We dressed ourselves as warm as possible during the nights with the clothes we found on the way and made fires to keep us warm. At first, it was really nice having a little fire, but as soon as it died out, you could feel how your bones slowly turned cold again. And waking up the next morning... You could feel barely anything at all... What's worse was that food and water was running low... At some point, we all had to split just one loaf of bread together and although it didn't seem much, I was happy with it. It satisfied my hunger. I lost a lot of weight in those days... [br]

[br]

But on the night of day 13, everything took a turn for the worst. Everyone was so exhausted by the cold and hunger, demoralisation got worse by the day and not to mention the worries and the things we experienced... And maybe it's because we lost one on the way... No one ever gave a thought that it was possible for us to die on the way but... It was possible... [br]

[br]

I was asleep that night, on thick blankets, all covered up, trying to warm myself up... And I fell asleep... But many hours later, I woke up by the sounds of yelling that seemed to get louder and louder... As I slowly opened my eyes, I noticed Mahabi and Ceylan having a fight... And I noticed she had tears in her eyes... [br]

[br]

Mahabi: -in the middle of fracking nowhere; freezing our asses off and you wanna go back?!! Are you out of your fracking mind?!! [br]

[br]

Ceylan: Don't you see?!! This is getting us nowhere!! It would have been better if we stayed there!! This is fracking hopeless!! [br]

[br]

Mahabi: And do what once we get there?!! Freeze our asses off inside the houses?!! Starve to death?!! Wait until we get attacked and one of us dies again?!! What happened to Terry is a good example of

why we can't stay in one place!! [br]

[br]

Ceylan: It's because moving away from the problem doesn't make it go away!! What if we reach Azerbaijan and find out it is just another city in ruins like every other fracking city on the fracking planet?!! Then what?!! [br]

[br]

Mahabi: Axel, talk some sense into her, for fracks sake!! [br]

[br]

I stared at Axel for a moment while I still pretended to be asleep... Axel closed his eyes and got out a blade from under his jacket and wipes it... [br]

[br]

Axel: ... You both point out something... Going back isn't an option but we can't stay here either... All we can do is to keep moving on... Mahabi's right on that... But what if we get there and discover the city is most likely in ruins, like Ceylan pointed out..? Then what...? [br]

[br]

Mahabi: Then we'll figure something else!! Then at least we tried it!![br]

Ceylan: I still think it's a bad idea to go... [br]

Mahabi: You wanna take unnecessary risks to go so that we all die on the way back?!! [br]

[br]

Ceylan: I'm saying that because you're fixating your hopes on some place that miraculously can take away all your problems!!! It's NOT for frack's sake, don't you realize?!! [br]

[br]

Mahabi: Terry said that-!![br]

[br]

Ceylan: Terry!! Was a friend of mine too!!! [br]

[br]

I noticed from the corners of my eyes that she stood in front of Mahabi, clenching her teeth as she tried to hold her tears. But she couldn't. I saw how tears rolled down her face as she was looking angry at Mahabi... [br]

[br]

Mahabi: Fine. Go back then. I don't give a frack... [br]

Ceylan: ... How the hell could you say something like that...? [br]

Mahabi: Because you make it sound like it's every man for himself now!! We stick together, no matter what!! But sure, abandon us!! Die somewhere out there alone!! What the hell are you waiting for?!! frack off already, you country matters!! [br]

[br]

At that point, Ceylan smacked Mahabi in his face really hard... I jumped up immediately when I saw that... Mahabi felt down on the ground and they started fighting for a short moment... They were really serious... The fight was escalating rapidly to the point that blood was flowing... And because Ceylan was way bigger and stronger than Mahabi, Ceylan managed to grab Mahabi's neck and pinned him down on the ground... Axel didn't do anything. He just stood there, looking at his blade and kept on wiping it... Ceylan stared coldly in Mahabi's eyes for a while as the tears were still rolling down her face... [br]

[br]

Mahabi: You wanna kill me...? Go ahead; I'll be the second... [br]

Ceylan: It doesn't matter if you die here, in Azerbaijan, or back there... We need-[br]

Lattei: Yeah, you're right! [br]

[br]

Then we all looked at Lattei... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: What...? [br]

Lattei: It doesn't matter... At some point, we'll all die! *laughs* [br]

Mahabi: ... The hell are you talking about...? [br]

Lattei: It's inevitable that we die. No one escapes from it... BUT!! We do however, have the choice... On how to die... It is the choices YOU make... *points finger at Ceylan* That will make all the differences... Its called destiny... *hics*[br]

[br]

Ceylan: ... Have you been drinking...? [br]

Lattei: Yes!! Yes, I admit I did!! Because it takes away the cold and problems!! *smashes bottle to the ground*[br]

[br]

Nicole: ... Where'd you get the booze...? [br]

Lattei: ... I... Smuggled... Some bottles when we were in Remington... [br]

Mahabi: ... You're drunk...? [br]

Lattei: I might be... I honestly can not tell the difference... But!! Let's not forget the issue here, my dear friends![br]

[br]

Ceylan: *sighs* [br]

Lattei: *'Pulvis et umbra sumus ab imo pectore semper fidelus'...*[br]

All: ... [br]

Lattei: *"We are nothing but shadows and dust, but from the bottom of my heart, I will always be faithful"...*

[br]

[br]

Ceylan: ... Faithful to what...? [br]

Lattei: Now that, my dear fluffy furry feline friend... Is a very good question... Will you stay faithful to the path that has been drawn out for you...? Or do you choose to make one instead...? Remember that every choice you make... Alters your destiny... Going back and die...? Staying here and die...? Or move on and die...? It doesn't matter... But if you go on... You might have chosen the right thing... Because we both know... That here and back there... Is nothing but emptiness... You don't know if Azerbaijan is nothing but shadows and dust... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: *sighs* [br]

Lattei: Now get off of my cousin; you're giving him a boner... *hics* [br]

Mahabi: Well, I don't know, I kinda like it- [br]

Ceylan: What?!! frack you, Mahabi!! [br]

Lattei: Why can't we all just get alooooooong?!! *hics*[br]

Ceylan: You're fracking rat arsed... [br]

Lattei: *hics* I might be, but at least I stopped the fighting... Someone who's drunk has more common sense then you two... *grins*[br]

[br]

Then Ceylan and Mahabi looked at each other and knew he was right... So Ceylan got off of Mahabi as she helped him getting up... I looked at Mahabi and Ceylan and they both stared at each other again. Just because the fighting stopped didn't mean everything was fine and dandy. They both glared at each other as if they could fight again any time, but Ceylan walked passed us and isolated herself as she got

down on the ground to catch some sleep again. And well, Mahabi sat down next to Axel... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Nice move, Lattei... *smiles*[br]

Lattei: *nods* [br]

Nicole: ... Damn, your breath stinks... [br]

Lattei: That maybe so, my marsupial companion, but drunken people always tell the truth... [br]

Nicole: ... What truth? [br]

Lattei: ... That you have a really... Really big nose... And it's winking at me... [br]

Nicole: ... Just... Stop it. [br]

Lattei: Aye. [br]

[br]

Waking up the next morning, I felt my whole body turned numb by the cold... We got up and walked, and walked, and walked... Then walked some more... I didn't really know what the hell we were doing. It felt like we were going in circles like a bunch of sheep that got lost in a meadow. And the situation didn't really get any better since last night... Ceylan and Mahabi didn't talk to each other, and when they did, they only had arguments. Lattei looked like a mess and had a lot of trouble to move forward. And well, Axel never really said much, and Rachel... Well... She didn't understand what was going on... And then I felt as if I was the only sane person... Things weren't as they used to be... I could notice that the group I have been travelling with for so many months slowly started to grow apart. And I didn't really know why... While we were walking, I kept on thinking about what happened... But it only made me more depressed than I already was... And well... Terry... I just miss him so much... Ever since he died, no one laughed or joked anymore... And that was the only thing that cheered me up a bit... Everyone was just... Changed... To the point you didn't recognize anyone you've been together for so many months... And that was scary... [br]

[br]

After walking for a very long time, Lattei suddenly stopped. We didn't notice he fell behind until we looked back...[br]

[br]

Ceylan: Lattei, you coming or what? [br]

Lattei: Look... [br]

Nicole: ... Where? [br]

Lattei: Just over there, behind the trees... [br]

All: ...[br]

Axel: I don't see anything... [br]

Ceylan: You've been sipping booze again, Lattei...? [br]

Lattei: No... Look closer... [br]

[br]

I stared in the distance to the location that Lattei pointed out. I thought I saw black smoke going up... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Smoke...? [br]

Lattei: Yeah... [br]

Mahabi: ... Where there's smoke-[br]

Lattei: There's civilisation. [br]

Mahabi: ... I was gonna say "fire", but civilisation will do just fine. [br]

Ceylan: What the hell you're waiting for then?![br]

[br]

We picked up the pace towards the place where we saw the smoke coming from... As soon as we got

closer, we noticed it was an interstate with a lot of vehicles, as if it was a traffic jam... We didn't see any humans but nevertheless, we were being cautious... We got as low as we could and hid behind the concrete barrier... We peeked over it to see if anyone was there... And there were a lot of humans... Except they were all dead... On the road, in their vehicles, everywhere... I could see in the distance that there were smouldering wrecks... And it's kind of strange to stand on an interstate with so many cars and dead bodies... Then Axel yelled that he found food, and then everyone raided the cars and the luggage to see if anything was edible... We were absolutely starving and we ate anything we could find. We were literally stuffing ourselves with food... And well, seeing that everyone was getting stuffed and regained energy, the mood got brightened up... We sat on the roofs of the vehicles while we were eating... [br]

[br]

Axel: This is nice... [br]

Mahabi: *nods* [br]

Nicole: Yeah... Who would have thought we'd be having lunch at an interstate...? [br]

Lattei: I didn't... But I'm not complaining... Hehe...[br]

Ceylan: How's your head doing...? [br]

Lattei: ... It's still on my shoulders, if that's what you mean. [br]

Ceylan: ... No hang over? [br]

Lattei: ... No. Why? [br]

Ceylan: Because... Last night you were really rat-arsed...[br]

Lattei: Yeah but- [br]

Rachel: *gasps* Look! [br]

[br]

Then Rachel jumped off the roof and ran off not too far from where we sat... She stopped and looked up... What we saw was a destroyed road sign... Pieces of it were missing but it wasn't the sign itself that caught our attention... It caught our attention of what it said... "Azerba-" and the last A was cut in half... But we all knew it said Azerbaijan... We all looked at each other and you could see that everyone had a big smile on their faces... We just randomly hugged each other and laughed, knowing that we were close to our goal... I couldn't be more relieved... After months of walking, we were finally getting close... So after we quickly finished up eating and took a lot of food with us, we continued, following the road... [br]

[br]

We walked for fifteen minutes... Thirty minutes... Forty five minutes... An hour... An hour and a half... And still no road sign... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: I can't move on, guys... I- I need to rest... I don't feel so good... [br]

Mahabi: We rested an hour and a half ago!! Come on!! It's not that far anymore! [br]

Ceylan: *shakes head* [br]

Nicole: ... What's wrong...? [br]

Ceylan: I don't know... I'm feeling like this ever since last night but... It- It's getting worse... [br]

[br]

I noticed she was sweating on her forehead, and when I touched her forehead, I felt she was really warm... [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... I think you got a fever... [br]

Ceylan: *sighs* Oh great... L-Let's just go... [br]

Mahabi: Yeah. [br]

Nicole: No. She needs to rest... [br]

Lattei: Yeah. And besides, it's getting dark. We need a place to stay for the night anyway...[br]
[br]

Mahabi: Where the hell do you want to spend the night...? [br]

Lattei: Look around you... [br]

Mahabi: Oh no... [br]

Lattei: *nods* [br]

Mahabi: ... Oh no! Oh ho, no, no, no, no! Noooooo...[br]

Lattei: ... What?![br]

Mahabi: There's no fracking way I'm spending the night in a corpse infested interstate in some vehicle!!
frack no!! [br]

[br]

Lattei: ... Fine, you stay outside then. [br]

Nicole: I'll eh... Stay with Ceylan. [br]

[br]

Then Lattei walks off as Rachel followed him. He opens the door of the front passenger seat of a vehicle and Rachel jumped right in... Then Axel got in the same vehicle, but took place behind the driver's seat as Lattei got in the back... Luckily, there were no corpses in there... I looked at Mahabi and smiled at him, as he smiled back... [br]

[br]

Mahabi: Go for it... [br]

Nicole: *nods and smiles* [br]

[br]

Then we walked off to the vehicle behind them and Ceylan and I got in the back... [br]

[br]

Mahabi: Shove over!! [br]

Lattei: Get that backpack out of my face!! [br]

Mahabi: Sit upright!! You're hogging up all the space! [br]

Lattei: Get this damn backpack out of my face, fool!! [br]

Rachel: Sssssssssh... I can't sleep when you're talking so loud... [br]

Mahabi: ... Sleeping?[br]

Rachel: Can you tell me a story...? [br]

Lattei: Alright. Once upon a time, there was this hedgehog. And the hedgehog had a cousin WHO STILL DIDN'T GOT RID OF HIS DAMNED BACKPACK!!! [br]

[br]

Mahabi: ... [br]

Lattei: *throws backpack to the front and slaps the back of Mahabi's head* Much better. [br]

Mahabi: The slap wasn't necessary... [br]

Axel: Oh wow... [br]

Lattei/Mahabi: What? [br]

Axel: This is amazing... Look... It has a key... [br]

Rachel: You're supposed to turn it once! *turns key* [br]

Axel: Whoa, whoa, whoa!! The hell is happening?!! [br]

Rachel: ... The battery is turned on now which makes every electronic device in the car work... [br]

[br]

Axel: But it blows air! [br]

Rachel: Yes, warm air... To keep us warm you know... [br]

Axel: ... Are you a mechanic...? [br]

Rachel: ... No... [br]

Axel: ... How old are you...? [br]

Rachel: ... I'm only six... [br]

Axel: You're highly intelligent for someone of your age, you know that...? [br]

Rachel: ... Everyone knows that... [br]

Axel: ... Humans are so complicated... [br]

Lattei: You don't go out much, do you, Axel...? [br]

Axel: ... **turns on windshield wipers** The hell I just do?! What is that?! [br]

Rachel: ... Windshield wipers... It makes the rain go away... [br]

Axel: ... Amazing... **follows windshield wipers movements**[br]

Lattei: ... I need a drink. [br]

Mahabi: I second that... **sighs**[br]

[br]

I took off Ceylan's shoe's and gave her a lot of water to drink... Also, I got out a t-shirt and soaked it with water to place it on her forehead. [br]

[br]

Nicole: You alright now...? [br]

Ceylan: **nods** [br]

Nicole: Okay... [br]

[br]

I leaned against her as I felt she was touching my hand... This weird feeling went through my stomach and I was scared for a bit... But it felt so good that I couldn't remove my hand... But she moved her hand away instead... It stayed quiet for a while as I thought things over... I know I once said that I would never tell her how I feel about her. I also know that I once said that I don't wanna regret things anymore... And now would it be the perfect moment to tell her... I might regret that later, but I will certainly regret it if I never tried to tell her... So I thought up of a way to bring it up slowly... [br]

Nicole: Ceylan...? [br]

Ceylan: Yeah...? [br]

Nicole: Do you ever wonder why... Being truly honest can be a really hard thing to do...? [br]

Ceylan: Yeah... Why'd you ask...? [br]

Nicole: Because... [br]

Ceylan: ... Hm...? [br]

Nicole: Because I think I finally found the answer to my issues... And... It's... It's really hard to confront myself and to deal with it... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: What's wrong then...? [br]

Nicole: I've always been dependent on others... For better or worse... I'd like to cling on to someone who makes me feel better... I had that with Blain for a very long time... And Terry... And... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: ... And...? [br]

Nicole: And... Being with Terry made me change the way I think... [br]

Ceylan: You mean the night you slept with him...? [br]

Nicole: **nods**[br]

Ceylan: How so...? [br]

Nicole: We've seen and shared so many sorrows and grieve... And when you see someone now, they

either hate or they are totally devastated by their own sorrows... And... I realized that... You have to take every opportunity if someone shows you affection... Even if it's just a little bit... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: Yes but... Whadda ya mean with "change the way I think"...?[br]

Nicole: It doesn't matter if a girl loves a guy, or a guy likes another guy, or a girl kisses another girl... As long as you love each other, that's all there's to it... It's so simple yet people have a hard time with it... Love is something that has a whole lot of meanings... It can be from a simple hug to truly loving them from the bottom of your heart... [br]

[br]

Then it stayed silent for a while... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: ... What's it like, Nic...? [br]

Nicole: What's what like...? [br]

Ceylan: To be truly loved by someone... Like you loved Blain... [br]

Nicole: *sighs* It's nothing more but a painful memory now... But... It was wonderful... For twenty three years, I had all I ever wanted... And... No matter how many times I talk about his loss, it's not making me feel better nor does it bring him back... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: ... Is that why you slept with Terry.....? [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... Maybe... I don't know... It just happened... But for a short time, I felt what it was like to be loved again... I wouldn't do it again, but I would do everything to keep that feeling... It gives you hope in times of sorrow... But what I did with Terry shouldn't have happened... It wasn't fair towards him, because he felt the exact same way as I... And I was already feeling guilty but... Now that he's not here anymore, I'm feeling even guiltier than I already felt... Not just because of Terry, but because it's something I couldn't do towards Blain and Kaelyn... But... It happened... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: Hey... [br]

[br]

I felt how her soft fluffy paw reached out to my hand... And that same feeling was rushing through my stomach... I tried to keep that feeling as long as possible and cherished it... But for some reason, I couldn't face her, even though I wanted to... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: Don't blame yourself here, alright...? Things will be ok... Trust me... They'll understand... [br]

[br]

Nicole: *nods* [br]

[br]

It stayed silent for a while... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Do you understand Ceylan...? [br]

Ceylan: Understand what...? [br]

Nicole: Why it's so hard to love someone you know for sure doesn't love you the way you want it to be...? [br]

[br]

Ceylan: Heh... [br]

[br]

She looked at me with a smile... I didn't really get her... [br]

[br]

Nicole: What...? [br]

Ceylan: I always knew about you, you know... [br]

Nicole: Wh-What are you t-talking about...? [br]

Ceylan: Terry told me you liked me... And... That it went deeper than that... [br]

Nicole: He did.....? [br]

Ceylan: Yes... [br]

Nicole: *sighs* I eh... [br]

Ceylan: Hey... It's ok... [br]

[br]

Then she grabbed my hand again while her other hand went through my hair... Each and every second that lasted, was cherished and remembered... I wish she could keep doing that for eternity... Then I knew the answer of what she was gonna say... [br]

[br]

Nicole: You mean.....? [br]

Ceylan: ... No..... I'm sorry Nicole... I really like you, I truly do... But... I don't like you the way you like me... I'm sorry, Nic... [br]

[br]

At that moment, it seemed as if my whole world shattered to thousands of pieces once again... And... I always knew that there was a possibility that she wouldn't like me in the way I wanted it to be but... Knowing for sure was a direct stab in my heart... And it really hurt... I was so shattered by that, that I had a very hard time holding back my tears... [br]

Then I thought to myself that it was a mistake to have brought it up... And the list of regrets kept on growing...[br]

[br]

Ceylan: But... That doesn't mean we can't be friends anymore... Right.....? [br]

Nicole: *nods slowly* I... I rather have you as a friend then... Not having you at all... I'-I'm sorry... I'm sorry that I brought it up... Just... Forget it... I'm sorry..... I truly am... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: Hey... It's ok... [br]

[br]

I looked at Ceylan for a very long time... And I remembered all the things she made me feel... Like the time I showered with her... The nights I spend next to her... The things she made me feel when I was sad... No... I wasn't planning to give up that quick... So I moved my head closer to hers... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: Are you ok...? [br]

Nicole: ... [br]

Ceylan: Hmm...? [br]

Nicole: Ceylan...? [br]

Ceylan: Yeah...? [br]

Nicole: Have you ever kissed a guy before...? [br]

Ceylan: ... Yeah...?[br]

Nicole: And... What did you feel when you kissed him...? [br]

Ceylan: ... I don't really know how to describe it... [br]

[br]

It stayed silent again for a long time as I kept staring at in her eyes... She looked away every now and then, but her eyes always got back into mine... And at some point... I couldn't hold it anymore... I kissed

her... And felt that pleasant feeling rushing through my stomach and exploded all over my body... It felt all tingly and every body part felt really sensitive as I was still holding on to her hand... I wish it could have lasted longer but it didn't... But that's alright... [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... It's not anymore different when you kiss a guy... [br]

Ceylan: ... I eh... [br]

[br]

She looked really startled to say the least but didn't say anything... And neither did I... It stayed silent for a long time again...[br]

[br]

Meanwhile... [br]

[br]

Lattei: D-Did Nicole just kissed Ceylan?! [br]

Axel: What?!! [br]

Mahabi: You've been watching them?! [br]

Lattei: ... Yeah of course I did!! [br]

Mahabi: And they say I'm a pervert... [br]

Lattei: Oh, this is great! [br]

Axel: They kissed?! [br]

Lattei: Yeah!! [br]

Axel: ... Is that even legal for them to do?![br]

Mahabi: Axel, you killed people and you're asking if a kiss is legal...? Come on, it's not a big deal... [br]

[br]

Lattei: Two girls are kissing each other and you're saying it's not a big deal?! [br]

Mahabi: No, it's not. Come on, leave them be. [br]

Lattei: I think I know what the deal is here... [br]

Mahabi: ... [br]

Lattei: ... You don't like girls... [br]

Mahabi: What the hell are yo-[br]

Lattei: Noooooooooo, it's perfectly ok!! There's nothing wrong with having different feelings towards- [br]

[br]

Mahabi: Dude, you're saying I'm gay?! What the hell!!! I'm not!! [br]

Lattei: I think someone needs a hug... [br]

Mahabi: Yeah, well, I think you're frackin' rat-arsed again... [br]

Lattei: Aye... Axel, you better watch out tonight. [br]

Axel: *gets out blade and stares angry at Mahabi* [br]

Mahabi: Dude, get rid of the frackin' blade. He's only kidding. [br]

[br]

Lattei: *laughs* This is priceless... [br]

Mahabi: Will you stop looking at them?! Give them some privacy for fracks sake!! [br]

[br]

It stayed silent for a very long time... Maybe it was a mistake to kiss her... She didn't even look at me anymore... I wanted to find out what she was thinking so... I tried to break the silence... [br]

[br]

Nicole: It's getting cold..... [br]

Ceylan: Yeah... [br]

Nicole: *sighs* I didn't know why I did that... I'm sorry... It won't happen again... I promise... [br]

[br]

Then all of a sudden, she did something I wasn't expecting at all... She placed an arm around my shoulder and pressed me against her, holding me close... Her paw reached out to my hand again and I felt as if I could float away any second... Nothing happened anymore that night... I didn't know if she liked the kiss but... I could see she wasn't startled anymore... I cherished it, along with every other memory I have from her... And she was still right next to me... It didn't matter to me if she was startled... She knows now... I kissed her... And there was no one in the world who could take that moment away from me ever again...[br]

[br]

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[br]

28 - The Marksman Creed

Meanwhile, onboard of the titan... [br]

[br]

Zakhaev: Sit. [br]

Scyth: ... I rather stand... But thanks anyway... [br]

Zakhaev: *forces Scyth down in a chair* [br]

Scyth: ... [br]

Zakhaev: ... [br]

Scyth: Look, we both know that this will lead to a dead end... So why don't you just let me go, so we can go back to whatever the hell we were doing...? [br]

[br]

Zakhaev: *sighs and lights up cigarette* [br]

Scyth: ... *stares at Zakhaev* [br]

Zakhaev: *offers Scyth a smoke* [br]

Scyth: Nooooooo, motherfracker..... [br]

Zakhaev: ... *takes puff* This isn't getting us anywhere fast, is it...? [br]

Scyth: Nope... [br]

Zakhaev: *nods* ... Do you even know why you're here? [br]

Scyth: ... No... Miller is dead, and you're gonna walk in his footsteps... You got everything you want, so why the hell do you need me for....? [br]

[br]

Zakhaev: It's because I don't trust you... You're up to something... And I wanna know what you're up to... [br]

[br]

Scyth: ... *grins* [br]

Zakhaev: Back in Redmondville, I saw another one like you... [br]

Scyth: He's not... [br]

Zakhaev: ... Explain the patterns on his head then... [br]

Scyth: *shrugs* Humans have tattoo's, we have fur dye... *grins*[br]

Zakhaev: Don't act like a smartass towards me, Scyth... You'll regret it... [br]

Scyth: So what...? There's no way I'll be leaving this place alive, so why not poke a little fun of you while I still can...? [br]

[br]

Zakhaev: You're right. You're not gonna leave this place alive. Tomorrow, you'll be executed... But I'm dedicating this night to get everything I wanna know out of you... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Hehe... What makes you so sure that I'm gonna talk...?[br]

[br]

Zakhaev: ... How's your arm doing...? [br]

Scyth: It's healing along quite nicely, after you broke my arm a few hours ago...[br]

[br]

Zakhaev: Hmm-mm... And eh, the medics applied that cast on your arm, huh...? [br]

Scyth: Yeah, nice gesture of them... First they let you break my arm and then they fixed it up... [br]

[br]

Then Zakhaev grabbed Scyth's broken arm and slammed it at the edge of the table... [br]

[br]

Scyth: AAAAAAAAAH!!! FUUUUCK!!![br]

Zakhaev: Name...? Whereabouts...? [br]

Scyth: I DON'T KNOW!!! [br]

Zakhaev: Ah... *slams Scyth's arm against the table again* [br]

Scyth: OOOOOW!!! SON OF A dog!!!![br]

Zakhaev: You remember it now...? [br]

Scyth: NO!!! I SWEAR, MAN!! I REALLY DON'T KNOW!!! [br]

Zakhaev: ... *slams Scyth's arm against the table* [br]

Scyth: GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!! [br]

Zakhaev: How about now...? [br]

Scyth: I don't... I-I really don't know... [br]

Zakhaev: You know, the cast is starting to crack. *slams Scyth's arm again table*[br]

Scyth: YAAAAAARGH!!!! [br]

Zakhaev: Still don't know...? [br]

Scyth: *sobs* fracking hell!! Stop it!! [br]

Zakhaev: ... Go on... I'm listening... [br]

Scyth: *sobs* All I know is that he's from the Epsilon generation!![br]

Zakhaev: ... *grabs Scyth's arm* [br]

Scyth: *sobs* I frackING SWEAR MAN!, THAT'S ALL I KNOW!! [br]

Zakhaev: ... Epsilon generation huh...? He must be pretty old then... Lifeforms got a short lifespan of around 30 to 35 years... How come he's still alive then...? [br]

[br]

Scyth: *sobs* I don't know... I-I really don't... I swear... [br]

Zakhaev: ... You know how pathetic it is to see you sobbing...? [br]

Scyth: F-frack you... [br]

Zakhaev: Tanya? [br]

Tanya: Da?[br]

Zakhaev: Β οί÷ό, ÷οίâú Âú όçíàèè òì, ÷òì Âú îîæàòà î ïðääîàòà Ýíñèèíá. Ñííáúèòà ìíá, áñèè Âú íàøèè êîâ-÷òî...[br]

[br]

Tanya: Âú õîòèòà ìáíÿ, ÷οíáú èñèàòü áâî ñòàòèñòèéó...?[br]

Zakhaev: Äà, âñâ. Èìáíà, ààòù, ìáñòà ñîçääíèÿ. Âñâ...[br]

Tanya: Íà ýòîì...[br]

Zakhaev: *nods* [br]

[br]

Then the female walked out as she had a quick glare at Scyth... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Th-The hell you just said to her...? [br]

Zakhaev: ... I have one more question for you... And you've got 2 options... A: You listen and answer the question... B: You ignore the question, I pull you're thumbs out... [br]

[br]

Scyth: ... [br]

Zakhaev: Good... The thing is... The fact that you're a lifeform doesn't mean anything to me... Sure, lifeforms pose a threat for the entire civilized world but that's not the only reason why I'm after you... [br]

Scyth: Whadda ya mean...? [br]

Zakhaev: I'm also trying to investigate the virus break out... It was concealed and locked away safely... And yet it escaped... So why is it that you have been seen in Robotropolis...? What was your purpose there...? [br]

[br]

Scyth: ... [br]

Zakhaev: ... *flicks cigarette in Scyth's face* [br]

Scyth: *stares at Zakhaev* [br]

Zakhaev: I'm gonna find out Scyth... I will find out... [br]

[br]

Then Zakhaev got up and walked away... [br]

[br]

Scyth: *chuckles* [br]

Zakhaev: What's so funny...? [br]

Scyth: You're wife... She moaned like a whore when I stabbed her... And you're daughter... She squealed like a pig when I cut her pretty little face... She stared at me with those dark blue eyes, but I didn't feel remorse or anything... See anything that reminds you of her...? *gets out necklace from out of his pocket* [br]

[br]

Zakhaev runs towards Scyth and kicked him down. He kneeled next to him as he firmly pressed his pistol on Scyth's head... [br]

[br]

Scyth: My, my... Touchy subject... *grins* [br]

Zakhaev: You're gonna die tomorrow... [br]

Scyth: Take a good look at this face you see in front of you, Zakhaev... *grins* [br]

[br]

Zakhaev: ... [br]

Scyth: This face... Will haunt you... For the rest of your life... Even when I'm dead, you'll be seeing me... And the last thing you will remember before you die... Will be ME... [br]

[br]

Zakhaev: *cocks pistol* [br]

Scyth: Do it now... Come on... *drops something in Zakhaev's pocket* [br]

Zakhaev: *pistol whips Scyth* [br]

Scyth: *spits out blood* Killing me won't satisfy you, and you know it... *grins*[br]

Zakhaev: ... *pats Scyth's cheek* Maybe not, but that doesn't mean I shouldn't enjoy seeing your smelly carcass rot away... [br]

[br]

Zakhaev got up and kicked Scyth's broken arm. Scyth yelled in pain and with that, Zakhaev walked out of the room... [br]

[br]

I had a dream last night... And... It wasn't about Nicole... I was dreaming I was in a large open white space, and everything was just white as far as the eye could see. And I was walking... All of a sudden, I heard footsteps behind me. So I turned around... I saw this vague figure walking away

from me, and I followed it... I tried to get closer but I didn't get close enough to see who it was... And then the figure stopped and turned around... Then I saw it was Rouge... I yelled at her to follow me, but all she did was shaking her head. Again, I shouted at her and begged her to come with me, but she shook her head as a weak smile appeared on her face... She walked towards me, gave a firm hug and kissed my cheek... Then she looked me in the eyes while she still had a weak little smile on her face... Again, I yelled at her to come with me and again, she shook her head... She said: [br]

[br]

“There comes a time where the sun won't shine for you... That you don't feel hungry or thirsty... To give up on life and leave everything behind... When that time comes, don't give up. Why would you only accept the good days and not the bad? Be there for yourself... For everyone else that needs you... Be there for Nicole like Shadow was for me. She needs it... And so do you... Don't be afraid to tell her. She'll understand... You know what happens when you don't speak up your mind... So don't be afraid to do so... You've been a good friend to me, Blain... No one and nothing can take that away from me...” [br]

[br]

And with that, she walked off as I continued to yell at her to come back... But she didn't... She slowly faded away into dust that got blown away by a breeze... And that's where the dream ended... And then I realized what happened... I couldn't confirm nor deny if Rouge died or not. And that frustrated me... [br]

[br]

I got out of the barracks and went to the civilians area to look for Sonic and Amy. I haven't seen them in a long time because of all the stuff happening lately... After a while, I found Amy and Sonic sitting at a table somewhere, with food plates in front of them... They were eating but by the looks of it, they weren't really hungry... I got behind Amy and tapped her on her shoulder... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... Mind if I join...? [br]

Amy: *gasps* Blain!! [br]

[br]

She jumped up as soon as she heard my voice and she gave a firm hug... And I gave Sonic a hug as well... [br]

[br]

Sonic: Long time no see... [br]

Blain/Amy: ... [br]

Sonic: ... Literally... Hehe... [br]

Blain: How you doing, Sonic...? [br]

Sonic: *sighs* Same old... Same old... Just trying to live on, you know... [br]

Blain: Yeah... How you holding up, Amy...? [br]

Amy: Same really... What took you so long to visit...? [br]

Blain: Well, it's not like we're picking our noses on the other side... We've been busy... [br]

Amy: With what...? [br]

Blain: Resisting our oppressors... The MNAF is no more, and all that's left are a bunch of guerrilla resisting forces... And we're one of them... [br]

[br]

Sonic: So... Everything is going downhill now...? [br]

Blain: No, on the contrary... Scyth has inside information about GUN... It's a fact that the head of the

GUN Legions is dead... We have take out only one more person to end this... That's all I can say about it... But... Forget what I just told you... [br]

[br]

Sonic/Amy: *nods* [br]

Sonic: So it'll be over soon...? [br]

Blain: Yeah, hopefully... Then we can search for our friends... And... Start all over again... *sighs* [br]

[br]

Amy: Yeah... [br]

Blain: Have you seen any familiar faces...?[br]

Amy: *shakes head* [br]

Blain: *sighs* [br]

Amy: I think we're the only ones who made it... [br]

Blain: ... Yeah... [br]

[br]

At that point, I heard my radio going static... [br]

[br]

Radio: Sergeant, you're needed at COMScann, right away. We got a possible fix. [br]

Blain: ... I'm on my way, out. [br]

[br]

Amy: You have to go...? [br]

Blain: Yeah... I get back to you, I promise. [br]

Sonic: Be careful when you're out there... [br]

Blain: I will... Take care, guys. [br]

[br]

I gave Amy and Sonic a firm hug and I went over to COMScann... I was interested to see what they had for me this time... [br]

[br]

Once I got to the control room, I noticed everyone was grinning for some reason... And it kinda scared me... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... What's... All this about...? [br]

Regan: We got a possible fix on Zakhaev... [br]

Blain: Hey, when did you come back? [br]

Regan: Last night, but looks like we're leaving again tonight... [br]

Blain: What happened? [br]

Regan: Apparently, Scyth activated his tracker ID... So once we received the coordinates, we send the UAV to check the place out. Turned out it wasn't Scyth we saw walking around, but Zakhaev. Scyth must have slipped it in his pocket or something. [br]

[br]

Blain: Hehehe, clever bastard... [br]

Regan: Yeah. So, once we knew the coordinates, we used EADD to scope the place out. [br]

Blain: EADD...? [br]

Regan: Yeah. Enhanced Audio Detection Device. We know everything. Names, dates, locations, pretty much everything. [br]

[br]

Blain: Awesome... [br]

Regan: Yeah, it is, isn't it? We gotta get Scyth out of there, but we'll have to be quick. We'll leave

immediately. Everything is already set, you'll be briefed onboard. [br]

[br]

Blain: *nods* [br]

Regan: Alright then...[br]

[br]

Not long after that, we got escorted to the flightdeck hangar where a gunship already was waiting for us. As soon as Regan and I got in, it took off... [br]

[br]

Regan: Alright, listen up. Zakhaev is gonna meet his contact at Carver City, near the destroyed industrial terrain. He will close the deal with his contact, but we don't know what it's about. Scyth will be executed on the spot and that's where we come in. There's an abandoned skyscraper nearby, which gives us a good overview over the entire area. That's why we're gonna take Zakhaev out with a high powered sniper rifle. The skyscraper offers a good cover as well, seeing as its more then 2 kilometres away from the industrial terrain. The others will join us tomorrow morning, but we need to get into position first before everyone else arrives. That way, we'll make sure they won't take unnecessary risks. Once we give the signal that we're ready, the others will be standing by. Once Zakhaev is down, they take out the others and we all walk away home... [br]

[br]

Blain: Sounds easy... [br]

Regan: You're the only marksman here, so you'll have to take the shot... I'll be your observer...

Questions...? [br]

[br]

Blain: No... [br]

Regan: Alright then... [br]

[br]

Many hours later, the gunship dropped us off and flew off again... We made our way to the skyscraper that Regan pointed out and we went to the highest floor. Once we got there, I assembled the large sniper rifle as Regan was making our escape plan ready... [br]

[br]

Blain: What are you doing? [br]

Regan: Making sure we're getting out alive if it all goes wrong. You know how to grapple? [br]

Blain: Yeah. [br]

Regan: This one is slightly different. Clip the buckle on your vest and hold the handle. The harder you squeeze the handle, the slower you descend. [br]

[br]

Blain: Got it... [br]

[br]

It stayed silent for a long time as I was still assembling the rifle... Once I was ready, I smashed a window and placed the rifle in front of it... We contacted COMScann and let them know we were ready... Now all we could do was wait... [br]

[br]

Regan sat down near the window and stared outside as we saw the sun setting... [br]

[br]

Regan: Blain... On a more serious note...[br]

Blain: Wassup? [br]

Regan: *sighs* [br]

Blain: What's wrong? You nervous...? [br]

Regan: Of course I am, but that's not it... [br]

Blain: Than what is? [br]

Regan: It's about Vilani... [br]

Blain: What about her? [br]

Regan: I eh... I wanna ask you something... [br]

Blain: Go on... [br]

Regan: Vilani is the only family I have left... And... I wanted to ask you if you could keep an eye on her if I'm not here anymore... [br]

[br]

It got me thinking of Lara-Su... I watched over her as well when she was a kid... But when a kid grows up, it doesn't need you're protection anymore... And it's hard to let go of that... So I understand perfectly what Regan was feeling... [br]

[br]

Blain: I understand... [br]

Regan: Even though she's 24 years old, I still feel as if I need to protect her... I had that ever since I was little... And... That feeling only got stronger ever since this started... She proved herself that she can take care of herself just fine but... You know... She'll always be my little cousin... [br]

[br]

Blain: *nods* [br]

Regan: And I know she fancies Jarod... Which... I'm not too happy about... It's not like I don't like Jarod but... It's kind of hard to let her go and let her live her own life... And I realized it's even harder to let her go in these harsh times... So... All I'm asking is... To keep an eye on her... That's all... [br]

[br]

Blain: I will... [br]

[br]

For more then 14 hours, we hid in a tall skyscraper, waiting for Zakhaev to meet up with his contact... The dark orange skies slowly turned black as we both saw the sun rising many hours later. At some point, large 4x4 vehicles pulled up near the abandoned water tower to the south-west... Heavily armed men surrounded the perimeter as Zakhaev slammed a large suitcase on the hood of a 4x4... I insert one massive round in the chamber of the sniper rifle and gently let the bolt load the round... A short click was heard and I pulled the safety off... Then I looked through the scope as Regan got out his binoculars... [br]

[br]

Blain: COMScann, be advised, we have a positive ID on Zakhaev, stand by. [br]

Radio: Roger that, all forces are standing by. Good luck. [br]

Regan: Take you're time... [br]

[br]

I magnified until I got a clear vision on Zakhaev... It looked like he was arguing and made all sorts of hand gestures as the tensions were rising below... As I looked around through my scope to see who was there, I noticed Scyth being pushed forward by soldiers and they forced him down on his knees... Then something happened unexpected... All of a sudden, I saw a few furies down there, talking to Zakhaev as the other human soldiers stood on guard, watching the perimeter...[br]

[br]

Regan: ... Whoa... That's not supposed to happen... [br]

Blain: What the hell...? Furies...? That fox is his contact...? [br]

Regan: Yeah, looks like it... [br]

Blain: Those backstabbing country matters... fracking traitors... [br]

Regan: Yeah. Forget them. Zakhaev is our priority for now... Take you're aim...[br]

[br]

As I looked through the scope again, it felt as time stood still and everything moved in slow motion... Firing a rifle over a distance from more then two kilometre is extremely difficult, and in this case, even deadly if I missed... My breathing became slow and heavy... [br]

[br]

Blain: Got 'em in sight... [br]

[br]

Regan: The angle of the barrel should be aligned with the sight... Keep in mind, the further the bullet travels, the higher you'll have to aim... Keep an eye on the flag of the 4x4, and look for wind directions... Breathe slowly... Once you've aligned the target, hold your breath, and gently squeeze the trigger... [br]

[br]

The tension was unbearable... As I looked down through the scope in the distance, I saw Zakhaev was still negotiating with the furries as Scyth was still down on the ground, on his knees... I felt my finger squeezing the trigger real slowly as sweat drops poured off my forehead... My left hand supported the butt of the rifle as it was shaking a bit... [br]

[br]

Regan: Steady your left arm... [br]

[br]

It was all or nothing... Everything depended from this shot... It took me a few moments to recover... My hands were sweating and I closed my eyes for a short moment as I let out a quick sigh... As soon as I opened my eyes, I was ready... [br]

[br]

Regan: Hold..... Watch you're left..... Where the hell did he come from...? Patience Blain, keep still..... [br]

[br]

I had my aim focused on Zakhaev, but I heard jet engine sounds getting louder... At some point, I noticed I was looking into a cockpit of a gunship, patrolling the area... I actually was surprised of that, and it made me more nervous then I already was... I let out a quick sigh of relieve as the gunship passed by... As it passed on, I lost sight of Zakhaev and become even more nervous... As I looked around through the scope, I noticed he only moved a few metres away... fracking hell, I hate this... I'm getting too old for this shoot...[br]

[br]

As soon as the flag hangs dead on the pole, it seems as if time stopped for a very short moment... I gently squeezed the trigger, and the rifle made an ear deafening noise, as the massive recoil almost threw me across the room. Nevertheless, I managed to look through the scope and saw the bullets flight path. The bullet travelled faster then the speed of sound, so Zakhaev was dead before they heard anything... They started to panic and ran away in different directions as we saw the others coming out from their hiding places... Then I saw the cockpit of the gunship right in front of me...[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

29 - Someone to talk to...

Ceylan never mentioned anything about that kiss... It seemed as if she just ignored it, like it never took place. She knew it... And she never did anything with it... But I was too afraid to ask... I was scared to lose her, because of that... Maybe that was the reason why I liked her so much... I tried to show as much as affection as possible, and yet she didn't see it. Maybe she just wasn't interested... But that's what got me so fascinated about her... It's like she's a total mystery even though I know her better than anyone else. And the longer I spent time with her, the more fascinating she became... Even though she didn't tell me if she liked it or not, I always had a hunch that there was more about it... But that's just me I guess...[br]

[br]
I had a relatively peaceful night... Which was the first time in many months... It felt as if I could sleep without any disturbance for just one night... Without waking up by bad dreams, or scary feelings... Ceylan was still asleep when I slowly opened my eyes and noticed I was still leaning against her... I looked at her for a short moment and felt how my hand was going to hers... Her soft fluffy paws felt so familiar as I held it in my hand and looked at her again... I wish she would just tell me, for better or worse... I wish I could hold her like I held on to Blain so many years ago... To be able to look her in the eyes and realize she was feeling the same... [br]

[br]
I didn't know how long I've been sitting like that... As I looked outside, I noticed it was getting day and that it had been snowing while we were asleep... Although it was still fairly dark, you could see the white snow clearly... And everything was just white... The dead bodies were covered by the snow... And the longer I stared outside, the more of a fairytale imagine it became... It was really beautiful to see... [br]

[br]
At some point, I got snapped out of my daydream by hearing soft footsteps in the snow getting louder. It sounded like running, then walking... Running and walking... Then I didn't hear anything for a short moment until the walking continued... Then all of a sudden, I saw a human... I got as low as possible while I was looking petrified at it... He didn't seem to be armed, but he was going through the vehicles to look for something... He raided the car next to us, and then he got to our car... He opened the passenger door and I could hear him mumbling in himself as he searched the glove compartments and under the seats... I squeezed Ceylan's hand because I was really scared... I didn't know if there were more out there, but the last time a human got into our overnight stay, it turned for the worst... I bit my upper lip as I felt how my whole body was shaking... And not long after that, I noticed that Ceylan was slowly opened her eyes... I heard how she gasped when she saw the human, and I quickly muffled her mouth, but it was already too late... He noticed us... And he scared the shoot out of himself as well... [br]

[br]
Human: Whoa!!! What the- [br]

[br]
Right that second, he got dragged out of the car... There was a fighting going on outside and as soon as we got out, the human was down on his stomach as Lattei pressed his knee between the humans shoulder blade, holding a knife against his throat... Then I noticed he was a young guy, not older than

the age of 15 to 17 years old... [br]

[br]

Human: No, no, no!! Please!! I didn't mean to harm you guys!! I swear!! Don't kill me!! I didn't know you were here!! [br]

[br]

Lattei: Shut up!! *presses knee harder between the human's shoulder blades* [br]

Human: *gasps* [br]

Lattei: You ok? [br]

Ceylan: Y-Yeah, I'm fine... [br]

Lattei: Nic? [br]

Nicole: *nods quickly*[br]

Lattei: You alone...? [br]

Human: Yes!! Yes, I'm alone!! [br]

Lattei: The hell you're doing here? [br]

Human: Looking for food man!! Come on!! Let me go!! Please!! [br]

Nicole: Let him go, Lattei, he's just a kid... [br]

Lattei: What? [br]

Human: Please!! I didn't mean to-!! [br]

Lattei: Stop... Yelling... [br]

[br]

Lattei searched the humans pockets and backpack to see what he was carrying... He wasn't carrying any weapons, but that didn't mean we could trust him... The only thing Lattei found was a little bit of food and half a bottle of water... Then Lattei got off of him and as the human stood up, he looked at us nervously... And when he turned around to run away, Mahabi stood there, pointing a gun in the human's face... [br]

[br]

Human: No!!! Please!! Take the food!! Take everything I got!! Just don't kill me!! Please!! [br]

Mahabi: We're not interested in food... [br]

Human: Then whadda ya want from me?!![br]

Lattei: You're with them...? [br]

Human: ... Who?!![br]

All: ... [br]

Human: The hell you talking about?!! [br]

Mahabi: You mean you don't know what happened for the past few months...? [br]

Human: No!! I don't know!! Will you get that gun out of my face?!![br]

Mahabi: ... *lowers gun* [br]

Human: You are the first living souls I encounter in months!! I don't know what's happening here!! [br]

[br]

It stayed silent for a very long time... That was a very good question, because we didn't know what was going on either... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: It's eh... I don't know... We've seen everything happening from the start and yet we don't know what it's all about... [br]

[br]

Human: *sighs* [br]

Ceylan: Look... I eh... I think we got off on the wrong start... It's obviously you don't know what happened but... Eh... I-It's just that... [br]

[br]

Human: Just what...? [br]

Lattei: It's very hard for us to trust a human... We've seen... Numerous times humans killing furries and... We even have trouble to trust our own kind... We don't know who to trust... [br]

[br]

Human: You can trust me... I-I mean, I don't know what this is all about... [br]

Ceylan: Yeah... [br]

Human: Look eh... My house isn't far from here... It's in a little village that didn't get shot to pieces so... If you need to stay, I'll be happy to help... It's been a long time since I've talked to someone... Just...

Don't kill me... Please... I beg you... [br]

[br]

All: *nods slowly* [br]

Nicole: ... Thank you... [br]

[br]

Not long after that, Rachel got out of the car... The human looked rather surprised to see Rachel, and Rachel was baffled as well... Then Axel got out, rubbing his eyes and yawned until he saw us with the human... He stared at the human with wide eyes for a short moment... [br]

[br]

Axel: ... Holy shoot!! Lattei!! It's a human!! Take cover!! [br]

Lattei: Yeah, thanks for pointing that out... [br]

Axel: Run!! He's gonna kill us all!! [br]

Lattei: No he's not... [br]

Axel: What makes you think that?!! [br]

Mahabi: Because he promised not kill us... *chuckles* [br]

Axel: Ooooh... Alright then... [br]

[br]

We walked with the human to his home, and, like he said, wasn't far away. It was actually strange to see an entire village not shot to pieces, unlike everything else we saw. It felt so weird to be able to sit down on a couch and actually relax... Once we all sat down, he immediately went to a closet and got out all sort of things for us to eat. He placed everything on the kitchen table and we all looked at it... [br]

[br]

Human: Come on, eat... You must be hungry... [br]

[br]

He didn't have to say that twice... We almost dove on the table and stuffed ourselves until we couldn't eat anymore... But, at some point, we all looked at the human... [br]

[br]

Human: ... What?[br]

Ceylan: We really appreciate this... [br]

Mahabi: Yeah... [br]

Nicole: So... Thank you... [br]

Human: It's alright... [br]

Lattei: What's your name...? [br]

Human: Jason... Yours...? [br]

Lattei: I'm Lattei... [br]

Ceylan: I'm Ceylan... [br]

Nicole: Nicole... [br]

Rachel: Rachel... [br]

Axel: ... Axel... [br]

[br]

Jason: N-Nice to meet you guys... [br]

Nicole: Likewise, Jason... [br]

Jason: *nods quickly*[br]

[br]

You could see that the young guy was a bit nervous as he was looking at us for short moments... [br]

[br]

Lattei: What's wrong...? [br]

Jason: I eh... It's... Nothing... It's just that... Eh... [br]

Ceylan: Just tell us... [br]

Jason: It's been a very long time since I've talked to anyone... And eh... [br]

Nicole: Can I ask what happened...? [br]

Jason: I... eh... [br]

Ceylan: It's ok, share if you want...[br]

Nicole: So... What happened to you that you don't know...? [br]

Jason: Well... Eh... A-A few months ago, I had an accident and... Slipped into a coma... And... One day, I woke up on the ground on the first floor of the hospital... With a bed on its side and lots of debris as walls were collapsed and almost every window was shattered... And... I was on top of a dead body... And well, it wasn't like I could just walk away like that... Because I haven't walked in months, it took me a long time to get used to it again... And it was painful and a very hard thing to do... When I finally got up, I stumbled around to see if anyone was there... But... All I ever saw was dead bodies... And I didn't know what happened... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: Oooh... [br]

Lattei: Do you know where you're parents are...? [br]

Jason: No... I don't know where they are... And... My little sister... *sighs* [br]

Nicole: ... Do you know what you're parents did before the war...? [br]

Jason: Yeah... Well, sort off... They were political activists... [br]

Ceylan: Ooh... Eh... [br]

Jason: What...? [br]

Ceylan: GUN doesn't take too kindly towards political activists... [br]

Jason: I know that... [br]

Mahabi: So all this time you've been wandering alone...? [br]

Jason: Yeah, pretty much... But I never found out what happened... Do you know...? If you do... Please... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Well... Like I said... We don't really know what's going on as well... [br]

Jason: But you know more than me... [br]

[br]

We spend the rest of the day explaining to Jason of what exactly happened to us before we all met each other... It was rather interesting to hear everyone's story of what they did before the war broke loose. It was rather depressing to hear what everyone has been through, but some stories were also enjoyable to hear again... The things we told about our stay in Remington was fun when we look back now... We didn't have any worries back then... [br]

[br]

Many, many hours later, it turned dark once again and although it was still early, we felt really tired...

Rachel was allowed to sleep upstairs with Ceylan in the Jason's bedroom while Lattei stayed in his room and Mahabi in his sister's room... I was sleeping downstairs on a thick mattress with thick warm blankets and pillows... I forgot how wonderful a blanket feels when you get underneath it, and how soft a pillow can be when you rest your head on it... It was a luxury I wasn't used to anymore... But... No matter how nice the thick warm blankets felt, I just couldn't fall asleep... I didn't know what caused it... Jason was reading a book at the kitchen table so that I could sleep in the living room... At some point, I got up and walked towards him, and sat down across Jason... And I noticed it was still early in the evening... Half past ten... [br]

[br]

Jason: What's wrong...? [br]

Nicole: Nothing... I'm so tired and yet I can't sleep... [br]

Jason: Yeah, I got that too sometimes... Especially when I was alone... I'm so glad you guys decided to stay... [br]

[br]

Nicole: *smiles weakly*[br]

Jason: Can I get you anything...? [br]

Nicole: No, I'm fine... Thank you... [br]

Jason: A warm drink...? Tea, coffee, hot coco...? [br]

Nicole: You've got coffee...? [br]

Jason: *nods* Except I don't know how to make coffee... So...[br]

Nicole: That's alright... I'll make some if that's ok with you... [br]

Jason: Yeah, sure, go ahead... I'll make some tea for myself then... [br]

[br]

Jason got up and grabbed a cup out of a cupboard and a spoon from a kitchen drawer and placed it on the counter... A sealed bag of coffee was pulled out of a closet and the moment I opened it, I smelled the typical scent of coffee, which was a wonderful thing to smell again... I'm not addicted to coffee anymore, but having a cup would be really nice by now... I haven't had a cup of coffee in months... So I made coffee and poured it in a cup... Sugar and milk... And then I took my seat again... I looked at Jason for a moment as he closed his book and stared outside the window. I kept stirring my coffee and the whirlpool in it got me hypnotized for a short moment... Then I looked at Jason again... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Jason...? [br]

Jason: Hm...? [br]

Nicole: We really appreciate this... It's been a long time since we've had a comfortable warm place to spend the night... So... Thank you... [br]

[br]

Jason: *nods* [br]

Nicole: Heh...[br]

[br]

It stayed silent for a very long time... Jason wasn't really the kind of guy who talked a lot... We noticed that ever since we met him... But I'm glad he still had his morals and ideals, and for a kid of 17 years old, he was very mature... [br]

[br]

Jason: You know... [br]

Nicole: What...? [br]

Jason: It should be around New Years Eve by now... [br]

Nicole: How'd you know...? [br]

Jason: The last newspaper I found dates back to august the 15th... And... According to the stats thing on my hospital bed, I arrived the 21st of march... So... I've spent 6 months in a hospital... And calculated how many weeks passed by... And kept track of it ever since... I don't think it's that accurate but... Heh... Let's face it... I didn't have anything else to do... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Well... In that case... Happy New Year, Jason... [br]

Jason: Yeah... Happy New Year... [br]

[br]

Jason and I spend the rest of the evening sitting at the table... He drank up his tea and fell asleep on the kitchen table not long after that... And I couldn't sleep... I was so very tired and yet I couldn't sleep. How that was possible, I didn't know. I listened to Jason breathing quietly and wondered how he could fall asleep like that. And then I heard a sound upstairs... It sounded like... Wood creaking and a thud... I went upstairs to see what caused it, seeing as everyone was supposed to be asleep. As I checked the rooms, everyone was still asleep... Except for Ceylan... I saw Rachel asleep but not Ceylan... I moved into the room until something caught my eye. A window to the left of the door was open and I could see the white tip of a tail dangling just below it. I went to the window and looked down on the roof tiles, and as I looked up, I noticed Ceylan sitting on the roof tiles, leaning against the slope of the roof... [br]

Nicole: It's a little cold to be outside right now... [br]

Ceylan: Whoa! [br]

Nicole: Sssh... It's me, Nicole... [br]

Ceylan: Oh, hey... You scared me... [br]

Nicole: Sorry... [br]

Ceylan: That's ok... [br]

Nicole: What are you doing up here...? [br]

Ceylan: Cooling down and... Thinking... [br]

Nicole: But... You still got a fever... You need to get inside... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: Can I talk to you, Nic...? [br]

Nicole: Huh? Oh... Yeah, of course...[br]

[br]

Then I climbed up and sat next to her, leaning against the roof slopes... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: Okay... Eh... Th-This isn't really easy for me to say, but...*sighs*[br]

Nicole: ... It's ok... Just say what you wanna say... [br]

Ceylan: I, eh... [br]

Nicole: What's up...? [br]

Ceylan: I've been... Thinking for a very long time and... [br]

Nicole: ... Yeah...? *smiles weakly*[br]

Ceylan: And... I...[br]

Nicole: ... Yeah...? [br]

Ceylan: I really like someone else... [br]

Nicole: Wait... What...? No... Who...?! [br]

Ceylan: ... Mahabi... [br]

Nicole: What.....? [br]

Ceylan: Well... I like him and... [br]

Nicole: No! Y-You shouldn't! I mean-[br]

Ceylan: ... Why not.....? [br]

Nicole: I eh... It's just that... I- I want you to prevent from making the same mistakes I did... [br]

[br]

Ceylan: I thought you said it wasn't a mistake... [br]

Nicole: *sighs* [br]

Ceylan: Look... I've been thinking over this for a very long time and I wanna tell Mahabi that I like him while I still can... And I wanna be with him... He's is a great guy...[br]

[br]

Nicole: I know that... ..Does he know you like him...? [br]

Ceylan: No... I don't think so... You ever saw him when he took his shirt off...? Dayumn... [br]

Nicole: ... But... You just had a fight with him not too long ago... [br]

Ceylan: Yeah but that's what I like about him... He doesn't let anyone push him around and... [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... *sighs*[br]

Ceylan: You don't like the idea, don't you...? [br]

Nicole: To be honest, no... No, I don't... [br]

Ceylan: ... You're jealous...? [br]

Nicole: N-no, I'm not... It's just that- [br]

Ceylan: You are jealous, aren't you...? [br]

Nicole: *sighs* [br]

Ceylan: Look, Nic, I thought we went through with this... I just can't... It just doesn't feel natural to me...

Maybe for you, but... [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... I don't wanna lose you... [br]

Ceylan: You're not gonna lose me... I'll always be you're friend... But it's time I start thinking about myself... And... Maybe you should do the same... [br]

[br]

Nicole: But- [br]

Ceylan: Listen, Nic... I didn't stop you from doing what you wanted to do with Terry, and even when you told me of what happened, I didn't think any different of you... It's not fair that you deny me from doing this... I don't need you're approval to do the things I want. Whether you like it or not... [br]

[br]

Nicole: *sighs* [br]

Ceylan: ...[br]

Nicole: ... I-I'm sorry... You're right... [br]

Ceylan: You're a great friend, Nic... But you gotta start thinking about yourself and move on... I can't do that for you... [br]

[br]

Nicole: *nods slowly* [br]

Ceylan: ... Okay... Good... [br]

Nicole: ... So... You're really gonna tell him...? [br]

Ceylan: *nods* ... Yeah... I'm not doing it to hurt you if that's what you think... I'm doing it for myself... [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... Alright then... If that's what you want... Then... I-I'm not stopping you... [br]

Ceylan: *smiles* Thanks... [br]

[br]

I stayed quiet for a very long time. I didn't know what to say. I could imagine how Ceylan would act with

Mahabi and I imagined what it would look like if I saw them together. And whatever I was imagining, I didn't like it... It hurt... I went through so many difficulties to tell her, only to find out that everything I went through was in vain... And that hurt a lot... I couldn't just witness how everything was crumbling in front of my eyes again... So that's why I had to go... [br]

[br]

I got downstairs again and sought refuge under my blankets as I rest my head on a soft pillow... It felt as if the blankets and the pillows would ease the pain I felt and I felt how warm and soft it was for my fur... Over the months, I've shed so many tears and this night was no exception... I can't explain what I felt that night, but I had really mixed feelings... I felt how my pillow got soaked with bitter tears that were shed quietly as I questioned myself over and over again of what to do... And I cried myself to sleep that night... [br]

[br]

I woke up by the sounds of a lot of boots walking in the snow... The boots sounded like an avalanche or something... Caterpillar tracks that drove through the snow... And as I opened my eyes slowly, I could see large iron legs passing by the windows... Every time a leg touched down, it made the ground shake like a little earthquake... And it was terrifying to see them passing by... It was total darkness outside, but the vehicles gave so much light, it made the soldiers look like black shadows that were passing by... It reminded me of those black shadows I once saw, and once I realized that, fear got the better of me... I ran upstairs as fast as I could, and shook everyone awake and made them look outside the window... We saw a few soldiers going inside a house and they came back with something to eat... And all we could do was to hope that they didn't get in this house... More and more soldiers decided to follow their example and got in the houses to look for food or any other things they might need. We saw a flash of light in one of the houses, shortly followed by a gunshot... Then more gunshots followed... The soldiers outside ran towards that house and a few more gunshots were heard... They came outside not long after that, followed with a small group of furies... They get thrown down on the ground as one soldier started talking to one of them. When the furry didn't answered, he got kicked in the face... Then the soldier who talked to that furry barked out orders and a lot of soldiers scattered around to look inside the houses... [br]

[br]

Lattei: Oh frack..... [br]

Mahabi: Turn that light off.....!! Turn that light off.....!!! [br]

[br]

We hid Rachel in a closet as we prepared ourselves for what was coming... As I looked outside the window again, I noticed the soldiers spread out further than just this particular street... A few more furies were found and got thrown on the street... Why they weren't shot right away, was something that kinda bothered me, but we would find out soon enough... We told Rachel to stay in that closet, no matter what, and that we all loved her... It seemed so strange that this was the end of everything we've ever been through, and we all knew that we wouldn't get out alive from this village... We were so close to our goal... And we would never see another sunrise again... [br]

[br]

We knew hiding wouldn't make a difference... They'll find us anyway... We left the room where Rachel was in and sat in the room next to it, across the stairs... We all looked at each other and didn't say anything, knowing that this was the end... Ever since I know Ceylan, I've never seen her crying in despair... But now she was sobbing quietly... We all sat down on a bed and held each others hand as we were waiting for them... The door got kicked in downstairs and I heard someone running... I heard a gasp and the sounds of wood breaking into pieces rang throughout the house... I heard Jason begging and pleading as someone unknown was yelling at him... Then we heard the boots running up the stairs...

And they barged through the door, aiming their weapons at us... About eight of them... We didn't put up any resistance, knowing it was useless... And so, we got escorted outside, on the street, in the cold and joined the group of furies... We heard a gunshot behind us... And the soldier walked out of the house... Without Jason... [br]

[br]

A long time passed by, standing in the cold... At some point, the group grew to a total amount of around 30 furies... I held on to Axel and Mahabi, as Ceylan and Lattei were not far from us... As I looked at Mahabi, I noticed he was looking at Lattei and he nodded in an almost inconspicuous way... Then Mahabi whispered very quietly as he grabbed Axels' and my hand and we pushed our way back very slowly... [br]

[br]

Mahabi: We' can't die tonight..... We're so close now..... Lattei and I did this before..... So listen closely..... [br]

[br]

Axel: What's gonna happen.....? [br]

Mahabi: They will open fire on us..... When they do, get down as low as possible, don't let go of me..... Keep..... Absolutely..... still..... Once you're down on the ground..... And whatever happens..... Don't run away..... [br]

[br]

*Nicole/Axel: *nods slowly* [br]*

[br]

The soldiers walked around, barking orders to everyone else as a group of eight soldiers aimed their weapons at the group... I closed my eyes as I could hear them yelling and squeezed Mahabi's hand... As soon as I opened my eyes... The soldier yelled to open fire... [br]

[br]

Mahabi pulled me down along with Axel... I hit my head against the curb of the street and I felt dizzy... As I was down on the cold pavement, I heard gunfire rattle and people screaming... And I felt a stream of blood flowing down my head... And I passed out... It all turned black... [br]

[br]

I didn't know how long I was passed out... I didn't really felt that it was that long... But I guess it was... The soldiers were gone... As I slowly opened my eyes, I noticed a posture running away... I got up with a lot of effort, still dizzy and disoriented... I could vaguely hear someone yelling and I saw Lattei down on the ground... And I noticed he was severely hit in his arm... I looked up and noticed Axel standing next, looking at me... He reached out a hand to help me get up, and once I was on my feet, I noticed he had a weak smile on his face... And that was something I've never seen before on him... We both walked towards Mahabi and Lattei... Well, Axel walked... I stumbled... Mahabi kneeled next to Ceylan who wasn't moving... [br]

[br]

Lattei: I-I'm sorry... I... I-She got down but... I got hit and... I let go of her... I'm so sorry, Ceylan... [br]

[br]

I kneeled next to Mahabi and looked at Ceylan's lifeless body... I couldn't believe it at first... But... It happened... It felt like something was stuck in my throat... And all I could was to cling on to her as I couldn't hold my emotions anymore. I couldn't take it anymore... I kept telling her how much I loved her... And looking at her face... It seemed she could jump up any minute and tell us that it was nothing but a horrible joke... But she didn't... And when I finally realized that, I just collapsed and cried my eyes out, holding her close, like I did with Terry... But I never had to say goodbye to her... Which pains me the most... And looking at the others... Lattei and Mahabi never really showed their emotions, but that night, I

think they finally broke down... They weren't crying but you could see it in their eyes... [br]

[br]

Mahabi: Nicole..... [br]

*Nicole: *sobs* No... [br]*

Mahabi: We can't stay here... We have to move on... [br]

*Nicole: *sobs* No...! [br]*

Mahabi: Come on..... Up you go.....[br]

[br]

Mahabi tried to pull me up to move on, but I didn't cooperate. I stayed with her... I looked at her soft fluffy paws and placed them in mine... But I couldn't feel those feelings anymore... Just emptiness... And although it was very hard to leave her like that, I knew I had to... We had to move on if we wanna make it... And when I think about everything she ever said to me, or made me feel, I was glad to have known her... I felt as if she was the only one who truly understood me... And it's painful to lose someone like her... And right now, when I think about it... It made me realize I have more in common with her than I ever imagined... She's been more honest than I've ever been, even with myself... She never had the chance to say goodbye, but I still could... So I said goodbye to her... [br]

[br]

I stumbled back to Jason's house to get Rachel... As soon as I stood in the doorway, I noticed Jason's body on the ground, with a bullet hole in his head... Why Jason was shot is something I never understood... He's a human after all, one of their own kind... Maybe they saw him as a traitor... Well... If you asked me... Jason wasn't a traitor... He was just a kid who wanted to talk to somebody... And it didn't matter to him who it was he talked to... A kid of 17 years old has more common sense than the rest of the entire human race... He gave his life while defending his morals and ideals, and it's the ultimate sacrifice that someone can make. And I respect him for that... It makes me believe that not all humans are monsters... If only more would follow his example... [br]

[br]

Rachel... She wasn't there when I came for her... I searched the place but I couldn't find her... Then Axel revealed that they took her... They found her... And took her with them... I can only hope that they take good care of her... But nevertheless... It was still a very painful thing to witness... [br]

[br]

We had to continue... We couldn't stay... It was so difficult to say goodbye to Ceylan, Jason and Rachel... But we kept on going anyway... It went slow, and no one said anything... You could see that Mahabi and Lattei were on the brink of a mental breakdown and Axel... I couldn't really tell... But the fact that everyone was quiet said enough... We were exhausted by the cold... But we couldn't give up, not now we were so close... [br]

[br]

Hours later, we saw the outskirts of the massive city... And Ceylan was right... It was a city in ruins... We got so devastated by that, realizing that everything was in vain, and that everyone who didn't make it on the way, died for nothing... It was a silly thing to think that a city could give us hope, even though it was most likely in ruins... But we knew now, and we didn't know what to do... And we all gave up on hope... It all shattered into thousands of pieces right in front of our noses... And so... We started to make the long journey back... We couldn't care anymore... It might as well be all over... [br]

[br]

Lattei was the first one who collapsed by exhaustion... As Mahabi was carrying him, he collapsed too not long after that... I couldn't feel my legs anymore... And I hit the ground as well... I closed my eyes slowly and wished it was all over... [br]

[br]

Then the next thing I felt was that I was wrapped up in thick blankets... As I slowly opened my eyes, I noticed we were up high in the sky... At first, I thought I died or something and that my soul was floating through the air... But as I looked around, I noticed I was in an airtransport... Were we kidnapped...? I hope not... It was so surreal... Then I heard the pilots talking... [br]

[br]

???: COMScann, this Outlaw-2-5-niner, be advised, we found 4 civillians out in the open, 3 male, one female. Their showing signs of hypothermia. One male shot in the arm, condition critical. Female has multiple lacerations in the face. Notify EMT's. ETA, 15 minutes. [br]

[br]

Radio: Copy that, Outlaw-2-5-niner, notifying EMT's. [br]

[br]

I felt how I slipped away slowly... I was so tired of everything... And I just hoped that, when I close my eyes, I'll never open them again... To have a peaceful sleep at last... And never to wake up again... [br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

30 - Welcome back...

Regan: Go, go, GO!!! MOOOOOVE!!! [br]

[br]

Regan and I jumped up and ran towards the window where he already prepared the ropes for us to escape. The gunship fired its board cannons immediately and we saw chunks of concrete flying everywhere... We never expected to make a hasty exit, and we literally jumped out of the window, grabbing on to the ropes and as we fell down, we clipped the buckles to our vests. I descended faster than Regan, but as I looked up, I noticed he had trouble. It looked as if the rope got tangled in the buckle and with one quick desperate yank, the rope gave in and he started descending rapidly again... Then it happened... A massive fireball exploded out of the floor we jumped out from. Large pieces of concrete and shattered glass was flying everywhere and I kept my head down and tried to stay as close to the building as possible. As I looked up, I noticed that Regan was dangling on the rope high above me, unconscious, with a massive cut in his face. He got hit by a large piece of concrete... The gunship continued to fire rapidly and I saw bullets whizzing by high above me... Then Regan's rope snapped, which was inevitable to happen and the only thing I could do was to watch how he fell a long way down... I descended as quickly as I could but all of a sudden, I heard a loud explosion and heard the gunship crash in the building... My rope snapped too and I fell 4 storeys down, landing on my left arm... [br]

[br]

It took me a while to recover and I looked at my left arm. It was a total mess... I couldn't use my left arm and I felt hydraulic fluids leaking... And not to mention the cuts and bruises I had... Then I noticed Regan's body, lifelessly on the ground, with his eyes wide open... I tried to get up, but I couldn't... So I crawled towards him... And even though I knew he was already dead, I still checked to feel if there were any signs of life... But... There wasn't... As I looked up, I noticed GUN troops coming closer, over the hills... And I had to go... I closed Regan's eyes and yanked his dogtags from his neck... I told him we'd get back for him... Then I got up with a lot of effort and tried to run for my life as fast as I could to warn the others...[br]

[br]

~~~[br]

[br]

*I was so exhausted... So tired... I slowly opened my eyes and noticed I was staring in the pitch black, no matter where I looked... Then a door slides open to my left... And I was blinded by the sudden burst of light I saw so all of a sudden. A black posture stands in the door and reached out for me, and I got terrified... At first, I thought I died and I tried to get away from it, until I heard a voice... And for some reason, that voice made me feel comfortable... And then I recognized it... It was the voice from the pilot I heard before... I wasn't dead... And I could hear it was a woman... She had a bit of a strange accent, but her voice sounded so sweet and comfortable which made me relax... And then I noticed I was being lifted out... It felt as if I was floating... She said that everything was gonna be alright and that things will get better... It was hard for me to talk but I was too exhausted... I scraped together all my strength and uttered something I couldn't really make sense of... I didn't realize what I was saying... Then I heard*

*“Azerbaijan”... Someone else started to talk in a serious tone, and I noticed the woman’s voice changed from a sweet, comforting voice to a serious one... It sounded like they had to go, that they needed backup... I didn’t know who needed backup, but... As soon as I got carried away, I saw that others were taking care of Mahabi, Lattei and Axel, and they get carried away as well... Once I realized I was truly safe, I felt myself slipping away in the most relaxing sleep I’ve ever had... [br]*

**[br]**

~~~[br]

[br]

The battle was already in full heat when I returned. I tried to run as fast as I could, jumping over obstacles and dead bodies, hoping that I wouldn’t get hit. And that wasn’t easy... I already let the others know that I was coming, and I immediately took cover with the others, seeing as I couldn’t handle a weapon with only one arm... Well, I could handle a pistol, but that’s not very effective against tanks and battlewalkers... A group of 5 carried that fox along with a few others he was with and Scyth to safety while we distracted the enemy. Which... Wasn’t really that easy...

[br]

[br]

Well what can I say...? There wasn’t really much we could do. We weren’t prepared for something like this. All we could do was to fall back and try to shoot enemy infantry while we couldn’t defend ourselves against the tanks and battlewalkers. That was the longest half hour I’ve ever experienced... I couldn’t do shoot! It was more like a “run and gun” action rather than a carefully planned tactical rescue mission. Jumping and running over dead bodies, dodging obstacles and trying to stay alive until we heard the message we’ve all been waiting for. The gunships arrived and took out most of the enemy tanks and armored vehicles. It didn’t take long before our area got secured. The other areas however, were not secured... [br]

[br]

Radio: We’re hit!! We’re hit!! I’ve lost my tail!! Mayday, mayday!! Outlaw 2-5-niner going in hard!! We’re going down!! [br]

[br]

Then I heard a loud crash and I saw black smoke in the distance... [br]

[br]

Radio: We have an Outlaw down, we have an Outlaw down. [br]

Blain: Oh shoot..... That’s Vilani... [br]

Shifty: Damn... [br]

[br]

Radio: Outlaw 2-5-niner, do you read?! [br]

Radio: Wait, wait, wait!! I see gun flashes coming out of the cockpit! [br]

Radio: *gasps* I’m here!! Keaton is K.I.A!! Enemy infantry is coming in fast!! I could sure use some help down here!! [br]

[br]

Radio: You heard the lady!! Moooooove your asses!!! [br]

Radio: Outlaw 2-3-niner, we’re giving fire support- *static noise* [br]

[br]

Then we heard another loud explosion as another gunship went down in the distance... [br]

[br]

Radio: Where the hell is that AA-fire coming from?!! [br]

Radio: Find that anti-aircraft vehicle and get rid of it!!! I’m gonna get her!!! [br]

Blain: That’s Jarod!! We gotta hustle!! Move!! [br]

Shifty: Crazy son of a dog!! He must REALLY like her to be THAT stupid!! [br]

Radio: We got your back!! Go!! [br]

[br]

Radio: I can see her coming out of the cockpit!! [br]

Radio: Get rid of the infantry there!! We gotta extract Outlaw 2-3-niner as well!! Secure the crash sites!!

[br]

[br]

Radio: Yeah, she's running away! She's got infantry on her tail!! Get rid of them!! [br]

Radio: Pilot and Co-pilot of Outlaw 2-3-niner are K.I.A. Bravo-2 is falling back. Out. [br]

[br]

Radio: Sierra 2 reporting, I lost sight of Outlaw 2-5-niner. Enemy infantry are closing in on her last known position. [br]

[br]

Blain: She's been shot?!! [br]

Radio: Hold on!! I'm almost there!! [br]

Shifty: Hope you can make it in time, Jarod... [br]

Radio: Sierra 2, I got a visual on the pilot. No signs of life visible. Enemy infantry are neutralized and remaining forces are falling back. [br]

[br]

Shifty: *sighs* [br]

Blain: Vilani's dead...?[br]

[br]

Radio: Discard my last. Pilot seeks refuge near the water tower. I lost visual contact. [br]

Radio: Vilani...? Can you hear me...? [br]

Radio: J-Jarod...? [br]

Radio: Yeah, you ok...? [br]

Radio: I-I got shot in my leg... It hurts... [br]

Radio: Hold on... I'm gonna get you out of here... I'll talk you through... Stay where you are right now...

Hostile is closing in... I can see him... Your right... Around two hundred meters behind you... [br]

[br]

Radio: J-Jarod.....? [br]

Radio: ... One hundred meters... I can't take him out... I'm too exposed in the open to fire... If you have to kill him, do it quietly... Get your knife ready... [br]

[br]

Then not long after that, we heard over the radio that there was a struggle... I saw in my HUD that Vilani was still moving, so it means she was still alive when the struggle ended... [br]

[br]

Radio: More hostiles are coming towards you Vilani!! Move!! We're gonna take them out!! [br]

[br]

We heard gunfire in the distance and a lot of chaos over the radio... It went on for a while until... [br]

[br]

Radio: *pants* Bravo-4 here, position cleared and under control... [br]

Blain: What about the pilot...? [br]

Radio: She's too busy hugging Jarod at the moment. [br]

Blain: Hehehe... [br]

Radio: All call-signs, what's your status? [br]

Radio: Bravo-1, we're good. [br]

Radio: Bravo-2, all clear. [br]

Radio: Bravo-3, we're good to go. Commanding officer is still M.I.A. We're still looking for him. [br]
[br]

Radio: Bravo-4, positions cleared and under control. [br]

Radio: Bravo-5, no contacts visible. [br]

Blain: Bravo-6, situation contained. [br]

Radio: All call-signs, rendezvous at the abandoned train yard for debriefing. Out. [br]
[br]

So we set out to the abandoned train yard... I noticed Scyth isolated himself with the briefcase Zakhaev was carrying... [br]

[br]

Blain: How you holding up...? [br]

[br]

**As soon as he heard my voice, he immediately closed the briefcase and looked at me... [br]
[br]**

Scyth: Heeeeeey, look... It's the guy who killed Zakhaev... [br]

Blain: Hehehehe... [br]

Scyth: Kudos... I'm a little envious of you... [br]

Blain: Why is that? [br]

Scyth: It's because you get to pull the trigger on Zakhaev... It was something I've always wanted to do...
[br]

[br]

Blain: *nods slowly* [br]

Scyth: But hey... You guys came for me anyway... So... Thank you... [br]

Blain: *shrugs* Well I wanted to leave you behind, but then I realized you had the keycard to the weapons armory... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Hehehe... [br]

Blain: Also... Your sniper rifle is blown to smithereens... [br]

Scyth: Well... It's a good thing I won't need it anymore... [br]

Blain: *nods* [br]

Scyth: *sighs* [br]

Blain: What's with the briefcase...? [br]

Scyth: Oh... Eh... It's just some... Data about lifeforms... Including me... It should be destroyed... [br]
[br]

Blain: I know... [br]

Scyth: ... There wasn't any data about you... [br]

Blain: ... I know... I destroyed it a long time ago... [br]

Scyth: Hehehehe...[br]

[br]

Then Scyth walked near the edge of the lake close by and looked at me. Not long after that, he swings the suitcase in the lake... It reminded me of Nicole and me doing the same thing a long time ago to close down a chapter of my life... [br]

[br]

Scyth: ... Now I'll just be another regular furry... *sighs* [br]

Blain: ... I can't believe it's all over now... [br]

Scyth: Well believe it... [br]

[br]

Scyth looked at the building where he was hiding in, and the moment I looked, some guys came out holding that fox. As soon as I entered that building, I noticed the others where that fox was with were all dead... I wanted to know why that fox meet up with Zakhaev in the first place... He got thrown on the ground while one of them firmly pressed his knee between his shoulder blades... I walked up to that fox and kneeled before him... [br]

[br]

Fox: You just made the biggest mistake of your life... [br]

Blain: And why is that...? You deny us our freedom and rights...? GUN wiped out the whole fracking MNAF and what we're trying to do, is to protect our way of living... [br]

[br]

Fox: And what might that be, sergeant...? What is OUR way of living...? Hm...? Are we so different from the humans...? [br]

[br]

Blain: No... But they took everything from us... And you're helping them... That's a fact... So... Why...? [br]

[br]

The fox looked around... Scyth had his eyes focused on that fox as that fox looked at Scyth for a short time... But he never answered the question... [br]

[br]

Fox: I'm not a traitor... Feel free to call me one, because it reminds me that I have nothing in common with you... All of you ... If only you knew... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... The hell is that supposed to mean...? [br]

Fox: ...[br]

[br]

Scyth: Enough of this shoot... *cocks pistol and aims at the head of the fox*[br]

[br]

At that point, he shot the traitorous fox in the head, just like that... [br]

[br]

Scyth: *sighs* [br]

Blain: *shakes head* [br]

Scyth: Let's get out of here... [br]

[br]

Once we got back to the others, the gunships got called to pick us up. We sat down in the grass to relax a bit and I noticed Jarod was carrying Vilani... Jarod looked really happy when Vilani was holding him around his neck real close... As soon as she got put on the ground, a medic took care of her leg... Then I remembered I had Regan's dogtags... As soon as the medic was done, I walked up to Vilani and tried to find a way to bring the news... [br]

[br]

Vilani: Hey sergeant... Good to see you... [br]

Blain: Likewise... That was one hell of a ride, was it...? Heh... [br]

Vilani: Yeah... [br]

[br]

She had a weak smile on her face and stared at me for a moment... The longer I stared at her, the more serious her face became... Then I got out Regan's dogtags from my pocket and placed it gently in her hands... [br]

[br]

Blain: I'm sorry, Vilani... [br]

[br]

She looked baffled at me first and stared at the dogtags for a while... She bit her upper lip and closed her eyes... It stayed silent for a while... [br]

[br]

Vilani: H-How'd it happen...? [br]

Blain: We got discovered by a gunship... And... While we were making our exit, Regan's rope snapped and fell a long way down... He was unconscious when he fell so... He didn't have any pain... [br]

[br]

Vilani: *nods slowly* [br]

[br]

Vilani didn't cry over the death of her cousin that evening. Even when Regan's body was recovered, she didn't cry. She stayed with him and kept scratching his head and even though she didn't cry, you could see she had a very hard time with it... [br]

[br]

I got patched up by a medic who took care of the cuts in my faces. And well, about my left arm, a cybernetic engineer should take a look at that once we got back in Azerbaijan. And we waited for the air transports to arrive... [br]

[br]

It took around fifteen minutes when they arrived... We all got in and tried to relax as much as possible once we got airborne, on our way home. But not long after that, we heard we were being shot at, and all of a sudden, blood splatters hit the roof and we heard the pilot gasping for air... He got hit... And we noticed the airtransport was going down...[br]

[br]

Shifty: Oh fracking hell!!! We're gonna die!! [br]

Vilani: Tavish!! Get the pilot out of his seat!!! [br]

[br]

Tavish and Jarod dragged the pilot away as Vilani made her way forward. She gasped in pain when she tried to move forward, but she managed to take her seat and pulled the controls with all her strength up... [br]

[br]

Shifty: We're gonna die!! We're gonna die!! We're gonna die!!! [br]

Jarod: Dont worry!! Vilani is a kick @\$\$ pilot!! She knows what she's doing!!![br]

Shifty: Yeah, well tell that to that big motherfracking rock over there!!! [br]

Jarod: WE'RE GONNA DIE!!!! [br]

[br]

We felt we collided as the bottom of the gunship hit the ground. Everyone got shaken apart, but we noticed we were ascending again, to our relief. I saw enemy infantry firing on us as we flew over them... Some other guys we didn't know got behind the stationary machine guns to fire back, and as they did, Vilani made all sorts of evasive manoeuvres and tried not to be gunned down... [br]

[br]

Tavish: *hurls* [br]

Jarod: Oh hell no!! [br]

[br]

Then Jarod grabbed Tavish's head and made it stick outside the doors... Then Tavish puked

once he realized how high we were... Tavish struggled to get free from his grip, but Jarod was way taller and stronger than him... It was actually a very disgusting yet entertaining thing to watch... And only after he was finished, Jarod pulled him in...[br]

[br]

Tavish: Gaaah!! The frack was that for?!! I could have been shot, you stupid frack!!! [br]

Jarod: There's no way I'll let you puke in my helmet again!!! And besides!! We're 2000 feet above ground you stupid duckweed!! Bullets don't reach that far!! [br]

[br]

Shifty: ... Duckweed...?! [br]

Tavish: Yeah well, still!!! [br]

Shifty: Dude... Imagine the guy down below who got Tavish's puke all over him... [br]

Tavish: *laughs* [br]

All: ... [br]

Tavish: ... What? [br]

Shifty: That wasn't supposed to be funny... It's fracking disgusting... Even for me... [br]

Tavish: ... Shutting up now... Heh... [br]

[br]

The guys kept on blabbering about all sorts of stuff while I didn't really listen. I just looked at my arm being a total mess. It reminded me of how Nicole used to freak out whenever she saw my arm was cut open so that Tails could do some maintenance on it... And no matter how many times she saw my arm cut open, she never stopped freaking out... And from one memory, comes another until countless of memories of her speeded by... And I felt myself drifting away in the most relaxing sleep I've ever had... [br]

[br]

~~~[br]

[br]

*I didn't know how long I've been asleep... To me, it felt like hours. I woke up in a room and found myself on a stretcher, all wrapped up in blankets. I felt much better than I did before, although I was a bit nauseous. I noticed it was dark outside, but I had no notion of time. No clock, nothing. As I looked to my right, I noticed that there was a girl next to me. A leopard. She was in bed as well while she was talking to a young guy who looked like a young coyote. The girl didn't really seemed to be that mortally wounded, but the coyote was doing something to her leg as I could hear her gasp every once in a while. At some point, he cleaned the wound and stitched it up nicely... [br]*

[br]

???: There, you're all set. [br]

???: Thanks Rico... [br]

Rico: No problem... Come back in a few days to get the stitches removed. And in the mean time, don't run or something. [br]

[br]

???: Alright... Thanks again... [br]

[br]

*Then I recognized that voice... It was from the pilot who took us in earlier... I heard her sighing and noticed she was chewing on a toothpick as she seemed to be carried away in thoughts. She seemed really sad about something... I stared at her for a when she finally turned her head towards me. [br]*

[br]

???: Hey... [br]

Nicole: Hi... [br]



[br]

*Then she turned her head away as she slowly got carried away in thoughts again... I heard her sigh... [br]*

[br]

Nicole: ... I recognized your voice... You're the pilot who brought us here, aren't you...? [br]

???: Yeah... \*smiles weakly\* [br]

[br]

*I reached out my hand and took hers, and gently squeezed in it... [br]*

[br]

Nicole: Thank you... [br]

???: \*nods and smiles weakly\*[br]

[br]

*Then she turned her head away once again... [br]*

[br]

Nicole: I'm Nicole... [br]

???: I'm Vilani... [br]

Nicole: \*smiles weakly\*[br]

Vilani: \*sighs\* [br]

Nicole: Can I ask what happened that made you end up here...? [br]

Vilani: I got shot in the leg after I was gunned down out of the air... [br]

Nicole: Ooh...[br]

Vilani: I'm not really in the mood to talk, ok...? [br]

Nicole: O-Ok, I'm sorry... [br]

[br]

*It sounded as if she could burst out in tears any time now... I didn't know what happened and I thought it was best to keep my mouth shut... So I turned over on my side and not long after that, I could hear her sob quietly... I wish I could have done something for her to make her feel better but I had a feeling that there was nothing I could do... I wanted to talk to her to make her feel better of whatever it is that was bothering her... It's because she got me out and well... Doing something in return is something I always do for people who do something for me... [br]*

[br]

*About fifteen minutes later, a big, muscled cat walked in through the doors and at first, I thought he was coming towards me, but then he walked straight over to Vilani. I turned over to the other side to see what was happening, and the cat got down on his knees and faced her... He stroked his hand on her cheek and I noticed she was opening her eyes slowly and saw she had red eyes... [br]*

[br]

???: Hey... I heard what happened to Regan..... How you holding up.....? [br]

Vilani: \*sobs\* I-I don't know... It seemed a-as if it just got through me or something... I-I... I don't know what to do now... [br]

[br]

???: Hey... It's ok... Let it all out... C'mere babe... [br]

[br]

*Then Vilani slowly clenched her arms around the guy and cried her eyes out... She looked so devastated and sad and... Maybe she lost her boyfriend or something... But it was heart breaking to see... [br]*

[br]

*They sat like that for a long time as the guy scratched her on her head until she finally seemed to calm*

*down... And all this time, I've been watching them... It reminded me of Blain and me when Kaelyn died. We could sit like that for hours not talking and just held each other while tears were flowing over our cheeks and hit one another's face... Then I realized I had a tear rolling over my cheek as well... I didn't realize the cat and Vilani were looking at me, but once I did, I quickly rubbed my eyes and turned my head the other way... It stayed silent for a while until I pretended to be asleep... And once they saw that, they talked again while I listened... [br]*

[br]

???: It's always hard to loose someone you love... I know... My mom passed away when I was nine... And... My sister and I had a really difficult time... Even now, I think of her every day... And whenever I think of her, I remember the simple things... Like... My mom tugging me in at night, and reading me a story... Or... She stood in the kitchen making all sorts of dishes and whenever I tried to taste some of her stuff, she smacked me with a spatula on my hands... And no matter how many times she smacked me with a spatula on my hands, I never stopped trying again shortly afterwards... It's because she cooked the best... Heh... Some people say the good memories are painful of someone you truly loved, but I don't agree with that... [br]

[br]

Vilani: ... Why not...? [br]

???: It's because the good memories remind you of how your loved ones lived... And not how they died...

[br]

[br]

*He had a point... I noticed Vilani sat up right and hugged him once again, clenching her arms firmly around him and held him close... And once I saw that, I couldn't hold myself anymore... [br]*

[br]

???: Are you alright...? [br]

Nicole: Y-Yeah, I-I'm fine... I eh... \*sighs\* I'm sorry I have listened to your conversation... I-I eh... It's a rude thing to do... I-I'm sorry... \*sighs\* [br]

[br]

Vilani: It's ok... [br]

Nicole: I wish... I wish I had someone to talk to... Just like you two... It reminded me of how my boyfriend and I used to be... [br]

[br]

???: ... Where is he now...?[br]

Nicole: He was one of the first victims out there... And... On the way, I lost three people I cared the most about... But eh... I-I won't bother you with that... I'm sorry... [br]

[br]

*I turned on my side again and closed my eyes to try to fall asleep... But I couldn't... The image in my head of Vilani hugging that guy was imprinted in my eyes... I kept seeing it, even though I closed my eyes... And I felt I could burst out in tears again, as if that was the only thing in the world that could make me feel better... And I started to believe that not long after that as all feelings came back... So I just let it go... Tears hit the canvas of the stretcher as I sobbed quietly... I didn't hear Vilani and that guy talking for a while... [br]*

[br]

Vilani: ... You can talk to us... If... If it makes you feel better... [br]

Nicole: \*sighs\* [br]

Vilani: Nicole, this is a good friend of mine, Jarod. [br]

Nicole: \*nods\*[br]

Jarod: Go on... [br]

[br]

*After hesitating for a while, I turned around and faced them... It was difficult for me to talk while I was literally choking down in my tears, but... I tried anyway... [br]*

[br]

Nicole: I eh... I lived in a village... Not far from a big city... My boyfriend was sent over to the north on a so called peace mission... I was worried sick until the next day, I heard the titan he was on got shot down and that there were no survivors... And well... If that wasn't enough, GUN troops invaded the city not long after that... And... The heavy fighting lasted for a few days until everything was obliterated... And that's when we realized we had to flee... We saw MNAF soldiers falling back and we went towards them, hoping they could protect us... And well, not long after that, we came under fire... There so much chaos and confusion, I lost sight of my family and friends and... When dawn broke down, a guy got me out of the city alive and we stayed hidden until it was night time... That was the first person of the group I travelled with... And on the way, we encountered so many things... We met new people and they joined us... We travelled with a group of 7 people... And only four of us arrived... One who didn't make it was a human girl... She was only six years old... And we saw how she got taken away while there was nothing we could do... That night, I lost two persons I cared about the most... And... It only happened two days ago... \*sighs\* [br]

[br]

Jarod: Oh whoa... [br]

Nicole: And... A lot of other things happened on the way... Things were just so surreal... But we had our good moments too, as far as you can call it that... Heh... [br]

[br]

Vilani: Ooh... [br]

Nicole: It's kinda funny because... The guy who saved way back said once that Azarbaijan wasn't that far anymore and... That we would both sip hot coco once we get there... Well... Here I am but... No hot coco... [br]

[br]

*It stayed silent for a long time again as I closed my eyes for a short moment... [br]*

[br]

Jarod: Where was your boyfriend stationed...? [br]

Nicole: He was sergeant of the 506<sup>th</sup> regiment... But... That's all I know... [br]

[br]

*Then all of a sudden, his eyes widened... As I looked at Vilani, I noticed she looked baffled at me... [br]*

[br]

Jarod: Wait, wait, wait... You're Nicole... THE Nicole...? [br]

Nicole: ... Yes...? [br]

Jarod: Whoa, whoa, whoa... Eh... Damn... [br]

Nicole: What's wrong...? [br]

Jarod: You're sergeant Blain's girl...? [br]

Nicole: Yeah... How'd you know his name...? [br]

Jarod: It's because I'm with the 506<sup>th</sup> regiment... Sergeant Blain is my commanding officer... [br]

[br]

Nicole: No... You can't be... There were no survivors... [br]

Jarod: Eh... Well, there is... I'm one of them... [br]

Nicole: But... You can't be... [br]

Jarod: ... Sergeant Blain... Big spiky dark blue hedgehog dude, with cyan patterns on his quills and swears a lot...? [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... Yeah...? [br]

Jarod: ... He's still alive... [br]

Nicole: ... Wait, what...? [br]

Jarod: Yeah...! He told so many things about you! Wait until he hears that you're here! [br]

Nicole: ... He can't be... [br]

Jarod: He is! [br]

Vilani: Where is he now...? [br]

Jarod: At a cybernetic engineer getting his arm fixed... [br]

Nicole: ... It really is him... [br]

Jarod: Wait, what the hell am I doing?! I should get 'im! [br]

Vilani: Well yeah... Duh... [br]

Jarod: Wait 'till he hears this!! [br]

[br]

*And with that, he ran out of the doors... I didn't know if he was telling truth... Maybe it was just someone who looked like Blain... [br]*

*[br]*

*~~~[br]*

[br]

Shifty: Sarge? [br]

Blain: \*sighs\* What? [br]

Shifty: You pull funny faces when you're in pain. \*chuckles\* [br]

Blain: Pffft... [br]

Jarod: Sergeant!!! [br]

[br]

**All of a sudden, Jarod barged through the doors and we all scared the living shoot out of ourselves. The engineer who was fixing my arm got scared too... And he poked a screwdriver in my arm. [br]**

**[br]**

Blain: OW!!! SON OF A dog!!! [br]

Jarod: ... Yeah... He's alive alright... [br]

Blain: The hell are you doing?!! [br]

Jarod: Sarge!! There's someone out there who wishes to see you!! [br]

Blain: ... Who is it...? [br]

Jarod: You haven't seen her in a long time... [br]

[br]

[br]

**[br]**

## 31 - Unforgotten burdens

*I thought that Jarod wouldn't return... Half an hour passed by without seeing him. And even though I had little faith that Blain was walking through those doors any time now, I was still nervous for some reason... And I didn't know why. I knew all too well he couldn't be here, and yet something inside of me told me to wait and see. There wasn't anything else I could do any way, but... Vilani kept looking at me and it was as if she felt how nervous I was... And then, all of a sudden...*

Blain: The frack is wrong you, Jarod?! You're mistak-

Vilani: Sarge...

Blain: What?!

*I saw a hedgehog standing at the door who looked a lot like Blain, accompanied by Jarod. The hedgehog stood dead in its tracks as it stared at me with wide eyes... Then it slowly got closer and placed a hand on my cheek... And I kept staring with disbelief at the hedgehog who was staring back at me... And I didn't know what to think...*

**There was a woman on a stretcher who resembled my beloved Nicole a lot... The fact that she looked a lot like her didn't mean I knew who she was... She couldn't be... And yet she was there on a stretcher in front staring at me with wide eyes... I just stood there looking at her... The longer I stared, the more freaked out she seemed to get... I wanted to comfort her and be sure if it really was her... I just couldn't believe what I was seeing... And I didn't know what to think...**

Nicole: ... N-No... You're not Blain... Y-You can't be...

Blain: Nic...?

Nicole: N-no... G-Get away from me...! Y-You can't be h-him...!

Blain; I-It's you... Nicole.....?!

Nicole: Get away from me...!!

*That hedgehog came closer in the mean time... He reached out his arms but I got so frightened all of a sudden that I wanted to get away from him... In the sudden burst of panic I felt, I fell off the stretcher and landed on the ground face down... I was too weak to get up off the ground and run away, so I gathered all of my strength to crawl away. But I couldn't go anywhere... Just this corner I thought would be the safest place to be... But I was wrong... He got closer once again by taking small steps and stared at me with those wide eyes again... I curled myself up for some reason in the corner, as if that was the only thing that could make him go away... But he didn't go... Instead, he kneeled before me... And he held me... I tried to get free from his grip by punching and kicking, but that didn't really seem to have any effect... I guess I was too weak to get free from him... Instead, he only clenched on me even tighter as I felt a tear hitting my shoulder...*

Nicole: \*sobs\* Leave me alone...! Leave me alone...!! Please...!

Blain: It's me...! It really is me, Nic...! Sssh... Sssh, it's ok... It's ok, Nic...

**Why she didn't recognize me straight away is something I will never know... But I do know, the**

fact that I thought she died a long time, and holding her right now in my arms was strange for me too... It must have felt strange for her too. But I knew she was here, right in my arms... The moment I looked at her eyes, I saw right away that it was her... I don't know how she survived, or how she got here, but the fact is, she's here, and that was the only thing that mattered to me that evening... I let my hand go through her hair and kept on assuring it was alright... That it really was me who was holding her, and not someone else... That I was alive... But that didn't mean it felt natural to me... I don't know what it was, but I felt so awkward holding her after all those months, thinking she died at the Deberan siege... And yet she was here... After sitting like that for a while, she finally calmed down... I let go of her, placed my hands on her cheeks and gently made her face me...

Blain: Ssh... It's alright... Look at me... Look at me, Nic... It's me... Blain... It's alright sweetie... Sssh...

**And after a moment of hesitation, she looked me in the eyes... And I'll never forget what I saw that evening... The moment she stared in my eyes, I could see she was so tired...**

*As I looked the hedgehog in his eyes, I noticed he had dark blue eyes... And those eyes told a story... A story of what he experienced throughout his life... The struggles he faced... The difficult decisions he had to make throughout his life... But I could also see a sparkle of hope... The good things he experienced... And I realized I was part of that... I placed my hands on his cheeks as I was captivated by those eyes... My hands were going through his quills as he gently wiped the tears out of my eyes... I closed my eyes for a short moment, and the moment I opened them, I stared in those dark blue eyes again... Then slowly, everything came back... With every gentle stroke over his quills, the more familiar it began to feel... I touched his scar on his chest... Gently wiped the scar near his right eye... I took off his glove and placed his hand into mine... As soon as I looked him in the eyes again, I knew it was him... He was gently wiping the tears out of my face again... And that's when I knew I had to hold him close and never let go of him again... I clenched my arms around him and cried my eyes out, for finally holding him again after all these months... I felt how he was shaking a bit until he too clenched his arms around me again, crying his eyes out...*

**How long have we been holding each other...? I have no idea... I saw the cuts she had in her face and wondered what happened to her... This wasn't the time to ask... She was so upset... And basically, I didn't know what to do now... For months, I thought she wasn't here anymore and all of a sudden, she showed up... She showed up the moment the war has ended for us. I can't remember the days I felt so fortunate as that particular evening, and seeing her desperately clenching and holding me like that has made an impact on me. For months I've been crying over her, and now I'm crying because I'm with her again... Things didn't make any sense but I didn't care... I was with her again... I felt how all of my thoughts and worries floated off the longer I was holding her...**

Blain: Rico.....?

Rico: Yes, sir...?

Blain: Does she need to stay here... Or...

Rico: She can come with you, sure, if that's what she wants... Other than the cuts on her faces, she's perfectly fine...

Blain: \*nods slowly\*

Rico: She needs to check in every day at the sickbay to let those cuts taken care of... It might get infected if it stays open like that so... Be sure to check in every day... Also, make sure she gets plenty of rest...

Blain: Alright... Thanks Rico...

Rico: Hehe, I wish you two the best of luck... Take care...

*It stayed silent for a long time again as we both saw the coyote walking off... I closed my eyes and rest my head on Blain's shoulder while I was still holding him close... And it seemed as if there wasn't an end to the tears flowing down our faces... I felt the urge to say something to him, but I didn't really know what... It was difficult to talk to him for some reason... He holds the back of my head and whispered how much he loved me and that everything is gonna be alright...*

Nicole: \*sobs\* I-I love you so much, Blain.....

Blain: \*sobs\* I love you too, Nic..... It's all over now..... We'll settle somewhere alone where we can spend the rest our days together, I quit the army..... I'll do anything to keep you with me... We're still growing old together, like you once said.....

Nicole: Things were so hard, Blain.....

Blain: I know..... I know..... But it's all over now..... You alright.....?

Nicole: I still can't believe you're here...

Blain: Hehe... Then I guess you can't believe who else is here...

Nicole: ... Who...?

Blain: ... Follow me... \*weak smile\*

**I helped her to get up from the ground by reaching out a hand after I got up... She took my hand and I pulled her up. She seemed so tired and weak, and walking seemed really difficult for her. I supported her as her arm went over my shoulders and I held her close... And so, we walked out of the sickbay... Together... Which was something I never thought I would ever do again... Just a simple thing like walking together... It felt so awkward yet I felt happy... We looked at each other once we were walking together and that's when, I think, we both truly realized it... Sorrow, anger and misunderstandings got replaced by overwhelming happiness and love as we looked each other in the eyes... Once we left the sickbay, it felt as if we left our sorrows and grieve behind in the sickbay... And once we got out of the doors, the only thing we felt was happiness...**

Vilani: \*holds Jarod's hand\*

Jarod: \*looks at Vilani\*

Vilani: \*smiles weakly\*

Jarod: Heh... Look at them...

Vilani: Heh...

Jarod: Miracles do happen...

Vilani: ... If only Regan was here to see this..... \*sighs\*

Jarod: ... Yeah..... \*stares at Vilani\*

Vilani: ... What's wrong.....?

Jarod: Nothing..... \*smiles\*

Vilani: \*sighs\*

Jarod: ... How you holding up.....?

Vilani: I don't know... I got really mixed feelings right now... I'm happy for the both of them but... Regan and... Keaton... \*sighs\*

Jarod: ... Wanna talk about it...?

Vilani: No... I rather want to be alone...

Jarod: ... Alright... If you... wanna... Talk... You know where to find me...

Vilani: Hey... Don't look so glum, Jarod... I'll be alright... Go and have a pint with Shifty and the others and celebrate... I'll catch up with you guys later...

Jarod: You sure...?

Vilani: Yeah... \*strokes Jarod's cheek\*

Jarod: Hm...?

Vilani: You're a really sweet guy, Jarod... I hope you realize that...

Jarod: \*nods slowly\*

Vilani: \*smiles weakly\*

Jarod: Alright...

***As soon Jarod got out of the sickbay, Vilani closed her eyes as a tear was running down her face... It didn't take long before she let her feelings express themselves in tears...***

*Blain and I were walking slowly through an enormous corridor. Every once in a while, I saw massive thick steel plated doors, with a small device next to it to punch in a code and a slot to swipe a keycard through. The place looked highly advanced with sorts of technological stuff and advanced security precautions. Each massive door differ according to security. One door had a plate on it that said "COMScann" and didn't really seem easy to get in. Along the keycard and the control panel to punch in some numbers, there was also something that looked like a fingerprint analyzer and an iris scan. Once we got through the massive doors, and turned right in another corridor, I saw the showers that resembled a lot like those high school ones, and the soldier's quarters where they slept. After the long corridor, we reached yet again some doors, we came in this massive hallway that looked like a cafeteria of some sort. Except there was no one... It was very silent as we heard our footsteps echoing...*

Nicole: ... Where's everyone...?

Blain: Eh... The base is divided in two sections... This is where the soldiers stay and eat and... The other section is for the refugees... There are rooms there, where you can sleep, eat and shower... It basically got everything you need... And hopefully, we'll be out soon and continue our lives...

Nicole: Yeah...

*Then after taking a few turns around a corner, we came through these massive doors again... And the closer we got, the louder it became. It sounded like... People cheering and laughing and crying and everything... Once we got through those doors... There was a gigantic room where literally thousands of people seemed to be celebrating something... And it was amazing to see so many people happy... For months, I haven't encountered many people and all of a sudden, I saw so many of them... It was amazing to see... And as we were walking through the crowds, I noticed so many things... Countless of furies, ranging from size, colour and species... Humans... Old ones, young ones... Some people got reunited after being separated for such a long time, while others had sorrow over the ones they lost... And it was so amazing to see... I kept on asking Blain who it was he mentioned earlier. He said*



*that I couldn't believe who was here as well. I really didn't know... But he didn't answered it and kept on having a huge smile on his face... And well, seeing everyone being happy made me smile as well... He looked for someone in the crowd and after a long time... We finally found it... Blain said to wait for a moment, so I waited... After a while, I heard a very familiar voice, but I couldn't determine who it was... Then all of a sudden, I saw her... Amy... She looked at me for a short moment until she put her arms around and kissed my forehead and cheeks... She rest her head on my shoulders as I heard her crying... And well, everything started all over again... I couldn't hold myself either... I was so glad to see her well...*

Amy: It's so good to see you, Nic.....

Nicole: I missed you so much.....

Amy: I missed you.....

*I took a good look at her face again and wiped the tears out of her eyes... And I just couldn't believe it... People I thought were dead came alive so all of a sudden... First Blain, then Amy... And if that wasn't enough, I noticed Blain was walking towards us, supporting someone else... And then I noticed that someone was Sonic... But there was something different about Sonic... I stood right in front of him and he wasn't even looking at me... But as I took a closer look, I noticed his eyes were all mat and pale... And then I realized Sonic was blind... Blain took Sonic's hands and guided them to my face... And all of a sudden, his eyes widened...*

Sonic: ... N-Nicole...?

*Then I took his hands and held them in mine...*

Nicole: Hey Sonic... \*smiles weakly\*

*Then he cuddled me for a long time while Blain and Amy were watching us... But then... Questions were bubbling up... And a lot of them...*

Nicole: How...? H-How did you all get here...? How'd you all survive...?

Amy: ... \*sighs\*

Nicole: ... How.....?

Sonic: It eh... It wasn't easy, I can tell you that...

Nicole: Yeah but.....

Amy: Blain...?

Blain: Yeah...?

Amy: Is there somewhere we can talk...? Just the four of us...?

Blain: ... \*nods\* Sure... Follow me...

**We made our way back to where Nicole and I came from. After walking for a while, we reached the briefing room where there were a lot of tables and chairs... Also a huge electronic whiteboard for tactical plans and holographic projectors were on the wall...**

Amy: ... Is this some kind of a movie theater or something...?

Blain: Hehehe... Naah... It's a briefing room....

Amy: Ooh...

Nicole: I thought it was a cafeteria or something...

Blain: Well in some way it is... Hehehe... There's a coffee machine over there so if you want anything, just take it...

Nicole: ... Coffee.....?

Blain: \*nods and smiles\*

**Nicole walked up to the coffee machine to get her a coffee... She always did that if she had the chance to get a coffee... I couldn't resist but to smile as I saw her walking towards it... And not long after that, she got back with a cup of coffee, and poured sugar and milk in it... She stirred, and stirred, and I just couldn't keep my eyes off of her... But then I realized why we were here in the first place... She had to know, even though it was hard for us to tell... And then we sat all down and it stayed quiet for a long time... Amy and I stared at Nicole while Sonic's head was down and we heard him sigh while Nicole stared in her coffee...**

Nicole: Guys... I need to know this... Are... Are we the only ones who made it...?

Sonic: ... \*sighs\*

Nicole: ... Are we.....?

Amy: We really don't know, Nicole...

Nicole: ... How about Cody.....? Is he alright...?

Amy/Blain/Sonic: ...

Nicole: ... Where is he.....?

Amy/Blain/Sonic: .....

Nicole: ... You know something... Tell me...!

Amy/Blain/Sonic: .....

Nicole: Tell me...!!

Amy/Blain/Sonic: .....

Nicole: Please.....

Amy: \*deep sigh\* ... The day we left the village... and... arrived in town... Cody and Tails were with us... But.....

Nicole: But what.....?

Sonic: It got... Chaotic so all of a sudden, as you might remember...

Nicole: ... I remember it all too well.....

Sonic: Well... Tails was with us... But... He got shot... And he died...

Nicole: ... What.....?

Amy: \*nods slowly\*

Nicole: ... No.....

Amy: And... Eh... This... This isn't really easy to tell you but... Once we got out of the city... We got evacuated to safety... In an airtransport... Cody was with us...

Nicole: ... Then where is he now.....?

Sonic: The airtransport got shot down on the way..... And... Cody didn't survive the crash...

Nicole: ... What.....? No...

Amy: I'm sorry.....

Nicole: \*shakes head slowly\*

Sonic: \*sighs\*

Nicole: I-It j-just never e-ends..... Does it.....?

Amy: \*shakes head\*

Nicole: A-And what about Kn-Knuckles...? Julie-Su...? ... Lara-Su...? Rouge...? Shadow.....?

Blain: We really don't know...

**It stayed silent for a very long time... Nicole looked down and wiped her eyes... Maybe she was trying to hide that she was crying, but everyone knew... I saw a tear drop falling in her coffee and she held the cup to warm up her hands...**

*They told me how they survived... How they got here... They told me what they've been through... What they've seen on the way and what they've experienced... And it made an impact on me to see Blain, Amy and even Sonic crying... Me on the other hand... I was crying too but unlike the others, I couldn't share my story... Not at the moment... I just couldn't talk... The oh so familiar feeling of something getting stuck in my throat came back... And I just couldn't talk... I just listened... Blain held my hand and held me close as we were listening to them...*

**Four hours... We talked for four hours and shared stories while a lot of tears were shed... But Nicole didn't say how she survived... I really wanted to know, but I couldn't ask that of her... And she had trouble with telling something... I guess she must have been through a lot, but we all did... But for some reason, it felt as if Nicole had been through more than the three of us combined... I didn't know... Every time I looked her in the eyes, it seemed as if I know what she's been through. But there were also things I saw that I couldn't comprehend... And I didn't know what it was... And maybe that was the reason why she couldn't share her story with us... Only time will tell...**

*It took me a long time to recover from the tears I shed ever since I've been here in Azerbaijan. But once I did, I saw the faces of Blain, Sonic and Amy and realized that I still had them. After we all recovered again from our sorrows, we walked back to that gigantic room where we saw those people again... And seeing everyone were still laughing and reuniting with others made me forget about my own sorrows. It was heart warming to see that... I didn't feel sad anymore... And knowing that Blain was holding my hand as we walked through the crowds and looked at me every now and then and smiled, made me feel happy... Once we found a place to sit, we started talking with everyone else... I noticed that complete total strangers acted toward each other as if they know each other for years. And that only felt good... It's a shame that only a war can unite people... And it's a sad thing to see, yet I was glad it happened... If everyone acted like nothing ever happened, it would truly have become unbearable... Then I noticed Blain looked over to a lynx who was talking to a girl... But because it was so noisy, we had trouble to hear each other...*

Shifty: Hey Lena!! You're looking fiiiiiiiiine today!!

Lena: Piss off Shifty!!

Shifty: Yeah, as if you had a chance with me!! Whahaha!!

Blain: Yo!! Shifty!! Over here!!

Shifty: Hey sarge!! How's it hanging!! Who's the pretty lady?!!

Blain: That would be Nicole!!

Nicole: Hi!! .

Shifty: THE Nicole?!!

Nicole: Yup!!

Shifty: Whoa!! Nice to meet you!! The sarge told us a lot about you!! No wonder he was upset!!

Nicole: \*smiles\*

Blain: Shifty, where are the others?!!

Shifty: Rico is taking care of people in the sickbay!! Aaaaaaaaand Jarod!! He's over there having a pint with Tavish and Scyth!!

Blain: Come on!! Let's go!!

**Nicole, Amy, Sonic and Shifty came along with me to walk towards Tavish, Scyth and Jarod. They looked as if they were discussing about something...**

Scyth: Room temperature?!! Dude!! A beer should be ice, and ice cold!!

Tavish: Well a Lager maybe!!

Scyth: Pssh!! Ha!! No, no no, a Lager would taste like cold owl piss!! Whaha!!

Jarod: I gotta home school ya both when it gets to beer!! shoot!! You guys have no taste whatsoever!! Stout beer!!

Tavish: What the hell is Stout beer?!!

Jarod: A nice brew which consists out of a delicate sweet aroma and a nice, bitter after taste!! Very nice on a hot day!!

Scyth: Sounds more like a lemonade to me!! Hey Blain!!

Blain: 'Sup guys?!!

*Blain introduced me to the guys. He said that they were with his regiment and they seemed really nice guys... One of them, Scyth, resembled Blain a lot... He was dark red, had three earrings in his left ear... Could he be a lifeform like Blain...? I didn't have the guts to ask and something deep inside me told me that it was a bad idea to ask... So I didn't...*

Shifty: Psst, Jarod.

Jarod: Huh?

Shifty: There is she...

Jarod: Who?

Shifty: Vilani, stupid... She stands there in a corner all there by herself...

Jarod: I think she wants to be alone... She's having a really hard right now...

Blain: That's why you gotta go to her. No one can deal with a loss on their own... Let alone two losses...

Scyth: Oh? Who else is eh...

Blain: Keaton...

Scyth: Ooh... I'm sorry to hear that...

**After that, Jarod didn't hesitate to go to her. Everyone could see the dude was in love with her, that was no secret. We all looked at them as Jarod touched her shoulder and once she turned around, she clenched her arms around him, which was actually a touching thing to see... Vilani**

**tried not to show her emotions. She always tried it. Whether she didn't want to be seen as a weak individual, or just not try to show it, I don't know. But all I know is that she had a hard time with it... And I felt sorry for her...**

Nicole: Vilani is the pilot who found me...

Blain: It was her...?

Nicole: Yeah... She's a really sweet girl...

***Meanwhile...***

Jarod: Hey... Don't worry, alright...? Everything is gonna be alright...

Vilani: Yeah but... That's the thing, Jarod...

Jarod: Whadda ya mean...?

Vilani: Well... When I heard that Regan died... It was a terrible shock to me... But... He experienced things in his few years than many people do in a lifetime... To do something well is so worthwhile that sometimes to die trying to do it is the only way to make sure if you really believe in it... He risked his life a lot to save others a lot... It would be a waste of life if he did nothing with what he believed in...

Jarod: ... Why is that...?

Vilani: It's because I believe that life is measured in achievements... And... Not in years alone... I feel the same about Keaton... And I respect them for that...

Jarod: I see...

Vilani: Which... Raises another question, Jarod... And I need to ask...

Jarod: ... Go on...

Vilani: If you feel that life is measured in achievements... Do you think you should do everything to make those achievements worthwhile...?

Jarod: ... Yeah..... It's because you need to pursuit your goals... Risk everything you got... Even if you have nothing to loose... Because that's the only way to know for sure... \*takes Vilani's hands\*

***It stayed silent for a while as Vilani was thinking. She looked away from Jarod but after she gathered enough courage, she faced him...***

Vilani: Jarod.....?

Jarod: Hm...?

Vilani: We... We know each other for months now and...

Jarod: ... Yeah...?

Vilani: When the war is over... I... I want you to come with me... And... I don't know why being this honest is so difficult for me but... I want you to know that you mean a lot to me as a friend... And... Maybe even beyond that... And... It's just that... I don't really know-

Jarod: \*kisses Vilani\*

Vilani: Eh... I eh...

Jarod: ... \*smiles\*

Vilani: ... I wasn't expecting that..... \*blushes and smiles\*

*I never knew why they were celebrating... It never got mentioned... I heard things that the war is over soon and all that but... For some reason, I couldn't really believe that...*

*Blain stayed with me that evening. And although its still kinda awkward to be with him, he tried his best to talk to me, even though I knew it was difficult for him too. A few hours later, I was getting really tired and Blain walked with me to his room. I saw a bed and I sat on it, and with every move I made, it was tiresome for me... Blain helped me getting undressed... He gently placed me down on the bed and tugged me in as he lies next to me... But I wanted him close... So I got on top of him... I stroked his quills and kissed him as my hands were in his...*

Blain: ... Are you alright, Nic.....?

Nicole: Yeah..... I just want you close.....

*I guided his hands to my back and told him to hold me as I lay my face down on his chest... He stroked one hand through my hair and it made me relax... I can't describe what I felt that evening but all I can tell was that it was a wonderful thing to feel...*

Blain: What happened, Nic.....? Hm.....?

Nicole: A lot..... Everything is just so surreal, Blain..... It's like..... I'm hallucinating or something..... For months I thought you were dead..... I accepted the fact that..... I wouldn't grow old in this world and..... Wouldn't die in a warm bed next to you..... And all of a sudden..... You came back..... Like you're back from the dead..... And Cody... Tails, and... Everyone else...

Blain: Yeah.....

Nicole: I lost three people I cared the most about on the way, Blain..... And it's so painful to see them in pain and... To... See them die..... And then you just walk away like that, because you have to move on..... And I can't take it anymore..... I-I..... I just can't..... I can't do it.....

**I felt a tear hitting my face again... And the fact that she was lying on top of me like that... It made me feel helpless... I wanted to help her... To make her feel better... But I didn't know what I could do... So I did the only thing I know that could comfort her... I held her close and scratched her behind her ear.....**

Nicole: Please, Blain... Whatever happens... Don't leave me..... Please... I need you..... Especially now..... need you the most.....

Blain: You're never gonna be alone, Nic..... We're sticking together like we always did..... We've been through a lot together and we'll make our way through this..... I'll never leave you..... I promise...

Nicole: \*kisses Blain\* ... Don't let go of me.....

Blain: I won't.....

**Nicole and I kissed a lot and didn't go any further that evening... We used to do that a lot when we were young but... When you're getting older, your perspective will change about that. And when I was young, I was naïve about that sort of thing... But that evening... It felt as if I was sleeping with her for the very first time again... The overwhelming feelings I had a long time ago came back as we were cuddling and held each other close. I forgot what it felt like... The only**

**thing that mattered was that she was here... Her hands were going through my quills, she touched my face a lot and kept on whispering in my ear of how much she loved me... And it really meant something to me. I did the same to her... I felt how her body was relaxing and not long after that, she fell asleep while she was still on her belly on top of me... She had her warm hands in mine as her face was on my chest, close to my face... I kissed her goodnight and felt how I drifted away in the most relaxing sleep I've ever had...**

*Even when Blain was asleep, I was crying... I was crying when I kissed him... With everything I did with him, I was crying... Not always on the outside... Most of the time, it was on the inside... And talking about it didn't help... Every time when I closed my eyes, I could see everything happening again... And... Like I said... I was afraid to fall asleep... But... As time went on and the experiences grew, I could also see it when I was wide awake... Hearing things... Like that bone snap... Smelling things... Like the incinerated corpses... Seeing things... How I watched Terry dieing in my arms... Seeing people getting shot... How I almost drowned and the things I felt... All I did nowadays was crying...*

*And I guess it finally took its toll on me... That night, I couldn't take it anymore... I couldn't watch how the entire world was destroying itself... And to see more of my friends die in this forsaken world, and to experience everything again... No... I couldn't take it anymore... So that night... I decided to end my life... In some way, my life already ended a long time ago...*

*I knew Blain always had a pistol under his pillow... It's a habit he never got rid of ever since... So I slowly moved his head away as he was still asleep... Found it... I sat on the edge of the bed, holding the gun and stared at it... A really disturbing thought ran through my mind, now that I think of it, and I thought that it would be a cure... A medicine, if you will... So I checked to see if it was loaded... Gently pulled the safety off like Blain showed me a long time ago...*

*I began to question what would hurt the least... Against the side of my head...? In my mouth...? Under my chin...? It didn't matter... All would be over in just a flash... So I put the pistol in my mouth... And... I tasted the cold steel barrel of the pistol... When I sat like that, it seems like everything was coming back... Like all of my memories just speed by... The longer it lasted, the shakier I became... I felt how my arms were trembling as I firmly closed my eyes... Regrets...? Sorrows...? It all rained down on me, and hit me like a brick every time, which is why I was determined to go on, because I couldn't take it anymore... Tears were rolling down my cheek and the only thought that could make it go away was the thought of everything ending soon... My finger was gently squeezing the trigger, ready when I am... A loud bang... And everything turned black...*

## 32 - My hero...

*I woke up all of a sudden... And realized I was in a bed... Unharmmed... I wasn't dead... It was a dream... A scary one again... I looked around the room, but didn't know where I was... And Blain wasn't next to me... [br]*

*[br]*

*The room was all dark... It seems so familiar but I couldn't figure out where I was... Then I heard footsteps and a door slowly opening up... I heard a click and a light got turned on... I turned my head and saw where the light came from... Then I heard that a shower was turned on... I listened how the water hit the stone tiles... And well, I was always curious... So I walked towards the door... And as I walked, I remembered... Everything came back... Carefully, I peeked around the door which was wide open, and there he was... Blain, taking a shower... I could hear him sigh every once in a while as he wiped his face... But he didn't see me... He had his back turned towards me and I just watched him... At some point, I walked right in... I got undressed and joined him... I gently clenched my arms around his stomach, and then he looks up surprised. Blain turned his face as I hugged him from behind... [br]*

*[br]*

Blain: Hey..... [br]

Nicole: Hey sweetie..... [br]

Blain: I didn't wake you, did I.....? [br]

Nicole: No..... [br]

Blain: ... You need to get back to bed... You need your rest..... [br]

Nicole: Just five more minutes..... I just wanna hold you..... [br]

Blain: \*smiles weakly\* [br]

Nicole: \*closes eyes\* What time is it.....? [br]

Blain: Six forty five AM..... [br]

[br]

*Then he too turned his body around and held me close..... [br]*

*[br]*

Nicole: How long have I been asleep.....? [br]

Blain: You slept through the whole day..... [br]

Nicole: I did.....? [br]

Blain: Yeah..... [br]

Nicole: Then what did you do.....? [br]

Blain: I was out on an extraction..... A few more survivors were found... One of 'em was dead when we got there..... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Oooh..... [br]

Blain: Yeah..... I just got back..... And I'm exhausted..... I'm getting too old for this.....[br]

Nicole: ... Then why don't you just quit.....? They'll understand.....[br]

Blain: Yeah..... But..... I can't..... I can't leave these guys..... Not after what we've all been through and experienced together..... It wouldn't be right.....[br]



[br]

Nicole: I don't want you to do this anymore, Blain..... Please..... I can't take it anymore if I loose you again.....[br]

[br]

Blain: \*sighs\* Zakhaev might be dead, but that doesn't mean its safe out there..... People need our help, and we'll do everything we can for them..... Humans..... Furrries, it doesn't matter..... They equally need our help to get rid of the people who oppose us..... The people who don't want to end this war..... And we need everyone..... That includes me too..... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Yeah, but..... [br]

Blain: Hey..... [br]

[br]

**She wasn't facing me... She looked down instead... She always did when you had a serious conversation with her... But the moment I gently placed my hands on her cheek and slowly lift her head up to face me, I saw in her eyes that she was scared. She really was telling the truth... And the longer I stared in her eyes, the soggier they became until a tear was slowly forming... And I wiped that tear away as she held on to me even tighter... [br]**

[br]

Blain: Don't worry about me, Nic..... I got 19 years of combat experience... I know what I'm doing..... And I'm not alone this time..... And I'll promise... I'll always be here for you..... I'll always be with you..... [br]

[br]

Nicole: You promise.....? [br]

Blain: I promise..... [br]

[br]

**Then I felt she clenched her arms around my back even tighter and rest her head against my chest. We cuddled for a long time under the shower...[br]**

[br]

*The moment we snugged back in bed, I felt the warm soft blanket on my skin... It felt so nice... And although I've been asleep for more then a day, I still felt so very tired... Blain cuddled me as his hand was going through my hair as I kept staring in his eyes... No spoken words... Just the glare in each others eyes... That was all we needed... And everything we wanted... I pulled him on top of me and kept his head close to see those eyes better... I closed my eyes and let everything happen... [br]*

[br]

*But the next day... I wasn't feeling myself once again... I noticed that Blain left again... And I was worried about him... But that wasn't the only thing that was bothering me... Terry and Ceylan did... I can't tell you of how much I miss them... I can't express that in words... But being reunited with Blain after so many months while I thought he was dead was shocking to me as well... I was so happy... But now... I never forgot about Terry and Ceylan but... I did for a short period... And now it's all coming back... Blain needs to know... But I'm scared to tell him... He wouldn't understand... But it's not fair not to tell him of what happened... I cant do that to him, not after so many years of being together and experiencing a lot... And I didn't know what to do... [br]*

[br]

*I visited Sonic and Amy... To talk... But that didn't really help either... They came up with suggestions I already had in mind, but was too afraid to actually do it... The more I thought about it, the more upset I became... At some point, I left... I needed some time alone... [br]*

[br]

*But sitting alone didn't helped either... I didn't know how to deal with this problem... Out of all the*

*problems and challenges I ever faced, I always found a way out... But not this one... [br]*

*[br]*

Mahabi: Dude!! [br]

*[br]*

*I got so startled by that, that I scared the shoot out of myself... I turned my head and noticed Mahabi standing behind me... [br]*

*[br]*

Nicole: Oh hey... [br]

Mahabi: ... Long time no see... [br]

Nicole: \*nods\* [br]

Mahabi: ... Something wrong...? [br]

Nicole: \*nods\* [br]

Mahabi: ... You wanna talk about it...? [br]

Nicole: \*shakes no\* [br]

Mahabi: ... Oh..... Ok then... [br]

Nicole: \*sighs\* [br]

Mahabi: ... [br]

Nicole: \*wipes face\* [br]

Mahabi: ... You know, Lattei is on the road to recovery encase your wondering... [br]

Nicole: Oh...? That's good to hear... [br]

Mahabi: ... Yeah. [br]

Nicole: ... [br]

Mahabi: ... [br]

Nicole: \*sighs\* [br]

Mahabi: "How you been, Mahabi?!" Well, Nicole, glad you asked! [br]

Nicole: ... I get the hint, Mahabi... I know, and I'm sorry... It's just that I have a lot on my mind right now...

*[br]*

*[br]*

Mahabi: ... Of course you do... I'll leave you to it then. [br]

*[br]*

*And so, Mahabi walked off...[br]*

*[br]*

*I went to Blain's room and flopped down on his bed, thinking about everything... It went on and on for hours until Blain finally came back. I immediately jumped up and hugged him and told him of how worried I was... [br]*

*[br]*

*Over the next few weeks, not much changed... Blain went out a lot to assist in whatever the hell he was doing... I saw him lesser and lesser... And whenever I was alone, I started thinking... About Ceylan, and Terry... But also about Blain... I still saw Mahabi and Axel, but I just wasn't in the mood to talk... [br]*

*[br]*

Mahabi: Look, there she goes again... [br]

Lattei: ... Who's the blue dude?[br]

Mahabi: The hell am I supposed to know? She's been ignoring us ever since we got here... [br]

Lattei: ... She does...? [br]

Mahabi: Yeah! [br]

Lattei: ... She wouldn't just ignore us... [br]

Mahabi: She does! Just look at her! Playing little miss sunshine... [br]

Lattei: She wouldn't do that... Not Nicole... [br]

Mahabi: Yeah, well, she does! You don't see her walking towards us right now to have a friendly chit-chat, now, does she?! She knows we're sitting here! [br]

[br]

Lattei: ... fracking hell..... After everything we did for her... [br]

Mahabi: And all of a sudden, we're too low for her... [br]

Lattei: Well... Maybe it's just a friend she hasn't seen in a very long time... [br]

Mahabi: Yeah, well maybe, but that doesn't mean she should forget who her other friends are... [br]

[br]

Lattei: ... True, true... [br]

Mahabi: Pfffft... frack her, we don't need her... Come on, let's bounce... [br]

[br]

Axel: ... I'm not made of rubber, I don't bounce... [br]

Mahabi: \*sighs\* Let's roll... [br]

Axel: ... Can't you see I'm not round...? I don't roll, I walk... [br]

[br]

Mahabi: ... It's slang for "let's go". [br]

Axel: ... Ooooooooooh... [br]

Mahabi: \*shakes head and sighs\* I think that shackle around your neck is cutting your blood circulation in your brain... That might explain a lot... [br]

[br]

Axel: ... [br]

Mahabi: What's up with that shackle anyway?! Get rid of it already! [br]

Axel: ... No one ever offered to help me with that shackle... [br]

Mahabi: ... So...? [br]

Axel: ... [br]

Mahabi: ... You're hopeless... [br]

[br]

*That evening, I thought everything was gonna be alright... Now that he's back, things were gonna be just fine... As evening fell, we went to bed together and cuddled ourselves to sleep... But that night, I woke up... I saw Blain getting out of bed and getting dressed in his uniform, and got out his rifle... [br]*

[br]

Nicole: ... You're going again...? [br]

Blain: ... Yeah... A group has gone missing and haven't reported in yet... We need to- [br]

Nicole: Don't bother... [br]

Blain: ... Huh...? [br]

Nicole: You don't have to explain it to me... Just... Just go... I'll just sleep by myself again... [br]

Blain: ... What's wrong with you...? [br]

Nicole: ... You said you wanna be with me, but you're hardly being with me... [br]

Blain: ... Nic... When everything is over...- [br]

Nicole: ... Exactly... WHEN...? I wanna be with you while I still can, Blain... [br]

Blain: ... [br]

Nicole: Don't you realize this will never end in a good way...? [br]

Blain: You're thinking about it way to much... [br]

Nicole: Then what makes you think we will survive this...? [br]

Blain: ... [br]

Nicole: Hm...? [br]

Blain: Don't be so unreasonable... [br]

Nicole: \*shakes head\* I'm just being real... [br]

Blain: ... I got to go now... [br]

Nicole: Yeah, you do that... Get back safe...[br]

Blain: ... Yeah. [br]

[br]

*And with that, he walked out of the door... [br]*

*[br]*

*It didn't get better the days after that... It felt like he didn't understand what I was going through... What I felt like... I wanted to be with him, but for some reason, he just didn't want to be with me... I tried to talk about it with him, but I always got the same answer I never could make much sense of. And at some point, I couldn't take it any more... [br]*

*[br]*

*One night, he got back... I pretended to be asleep as I felt he was gently scratching my paw. I wiggled my toes, but still pretended to be asleep... I saw from the corners of my eyes that he got undressed and flopped down on the bed, next to me... I felt he cuddled me, but I turned around... [br]*

*[br]*

Nicole: ... What do I need to do for you to be with me...? [br]

Blain: ... What...? [br]

Nicole: Answer me... [br]

Blain: ... What are you talking about...? [br]

Nicole: Don't you wanna be with me...? [br]

Blain: ... Huh...? Of course I want to be with you... [br]

Nicole: Then why aren't you with me...? [br]

Blain: ... I'm with you now... [br]

Nicole: ... Yeah..... [br]

Blain: ... [br]

Nicole: Blain... I'm trying to be with you... But it feels as if you don't wanna be with me... The only time I get to see you is at night... And I wake up the next morning and realizing you went off again... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... \*sighs\* [br]

Nicole: We really need to talk about this... [br]

Blain: ... We already did... [br]

Nicole: Then we'll do it again...[br]

Blain: Yeah, but not now... I'm tired... [br]

[br]

*Then he turned around in bed with his back facing me... At that point, I couldn't take it anymore... I got out of the room, and sat at a table... I tried not to cry but... I did anyway... Not long after that, I noticed that Blain sat across me... [br]*

*[br]*

Nicole: I don't get it Blain... I really don't... [br]

Blain: ... Nicole... You're forcing me to choose between you and my guys... Like I told you, I can't leave these guys... [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... Just stay, Blain... Stay and live a life with me... Who would you rather be with...?! [br]

[br]

Blain: ... I can't decide, Nic...! You're not the only who's facing difficult decisions! You're placing a

burden on me that's not even my burden to bear!! [br]

[br]

Nicole: What about ME, Blain?! Ever gave a thought about that?!! [br]

Blain: Every!! Single!! fracking!! Day!! And I don't know what the frack I'm supposed to do!! I can't leave my guys because it would be a wrong thing to do!! We stucked together when five hundred thousand furries died on a SINGLE!! Night!! [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... [br]

Blain: I do wanna be with you, Nicole... I really do... I love you... And I'm trying my best... But what you're asking from me is to abandon everyone I've been with over the months... We experienced so many things together and I've seen so many people I've known dead... [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... Yes but what about me...? You think I didn't have that...? Two persons I really cared for died while one got carried away... One of them died in my arms, for fracks sake, Blain... Do you have any idea what it does to you...? [br]

[br]

Blain: I know what it's like... [br]

Nicole: Then how come you don't understand...? Why is it so difficult for you to understand that I need you the most...? You, out of all the people in here...? [br]

[br]

Blain: You don't understand my situation either... And no matter how many times I try to explain it to you, you just don't understand... You have no idea how many sacrifices I had to make in order for me to get here... But you wouldn't understand, because you weren't there... [br]

[br]

*All of a sudden, I felt as if I could explode in anger... I got so pissed off so all of a sudden... [br]*

[br]

Nicole: Sacrifices...? Sacrifices?!! Don't you start on me about sacrifices, because you don't know shoot about what I'VE been through!!! I've sacrificed EVERYTHING that I could possibly lose when all the odds were against me!!! You better not be saying that I don't know what I'm talking about!! Because I DO know!! And I thought that you, of ALL persons, should've known that!! [br]

[br]

Blain: ... [br]

Nicole: ... But I guess I was wrong... You changed... You're not Blain... [br]

Blain: The hell you want me to do then?!! [br]

Nicole: I want you to understand!! And you don't!! It's because you're either too naïve or just don't care!! I don't know!! [br]

[br]

Blain: I KNOW what it's like Nicole!! Don't blame it on me!! I'm not fracking naïve here because I've SEEN everything!!! I know what it's like!! [br]

[br]

Nicole: Then you should have no problem understanding my situation here!! What I'VE been through, not JUST you! [br]

[br]

Blain: The frack you want me to do then?!! [br]

[br]

*In his anger, he slammed his left fist on the table, which immediately broke in half... He stared at me for a while... [br]*

[br]

Nicole: ... You just don't understand, do you.....? Maybe it was a mistake to come here... If I knew you were here and... Knew you'd be like this, I would've stayed where I was with the others... Then the persons who cared the most about ME would still be alive... [br]

[br]

Blain: ...[br]

Nicole: Go... Get out... Leave me alone... [br]

Blain: ... [br]

Nicole: Get out... [br]

Blain: So it's like that...?[br]

Nicole: Yes... I never chose that things turned out like this... You did... I tried to talk to you so that you can understand... But I'm sick and tired of people always blaming me when's it's not my fault so that I can suck it up and apologize... I might get used to the idea of you being dead again... I lived with that idea for so many months... It's not that hard... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... [br]

Nicole: ...[br]

Blain: Fine. [br]

[br]

**What she did wasn't fair towards me. But then again, I was doing the same thing to her. The situation was that we both didn't understand each other of what we've been through, yet we experienced something similar... Maybe Nicole experienced something I didn't, and vice versa... But whatever it was, we didn't understand each other... We both changed a lot... And it felt I was losing her all over again... [br]**

[br]

*I couldn't sleep for the entire night... All I did was crying... And Blain didn't come back that night... The next morning... He wasn't next to me as well... I went over to Sonic and Amy, but I couldn't find them... I've been looking around for hours, but I just couldn't find them... When evening fell, I saw Mahabi walking... I ran over to him and when he noticed me, he glared at me with cold eyes... [br]*

[br]

Nicole: Mahabi! I need to talk to you! [br]

Mahabi: What, just now? [br]

Nicole: Yeah... [br]

Mahabi: Pssh... [br]

[br]

*He turned around and walked away... What the hell did I do to make him act like this towards me...? I caught up with him and stood in front of him... [br]*

[br]

Nicole: Mahabi, please...! [br]

Mahabi: \*shakes no\* [br]

Nicole: ... What's wrong...? [br]

Mahabi: What's wrong?! You haven't talked to us in weeks, and all of a sudden, just because you need it, you need to talk to me?! You've been ignoring us for weeks!! Lattei almost died!! Did you even give a thought about that?! [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... I... I-I didn't know... [br]

Mahabi: No, of course you didn't know!! [br]

Nicole: Mahabi... I- [br]

Mahabi: frack off, Nic!! We don't need you, you don't need us!! [br]

[br]

*The moment I saw Mahabi walking away, it was moment when I realized I was alone... And it was painful... That was the loneliest evening I can remember... And I was really scared... I don't wanna be alone... [br]*

[br]

*Once I got back to Blain's room, I noticed he still didn't get back... I flopped down on his bed... I wanted to set everything right, even though I had little faith I could... I had this little spark of hope that I could set everything straight... But the longer I thought about it, the more hopeless it became... I realized it was something I couldn't get out... I didn't know what to do... I felt ashamed to realize that I've left Axel, Mahabi and Lattei alone after all the things they did for me... Blain... Terry... Ceylan... Rachel... ... Cody... I reached my limit... I couldn't take it anymore... I wanted things to end... [br]*

[br]

*I knew Blain always had a pistol under his pillow... It's a habit he never got rid of ever since... Found it... I sat on the edge of the bed, holding the gun and stared at it... A really disturbing thought ran through my mind, now that I think of it, and I thought that it would be a cure... A medicine, if you will... So I checked to see if it was loaded... Gently pulled the safety off like he showed me... It felt like a déjà-vu... [br]*

[br]

*I began to question what would hurt the least... Against the side of my head...? In my mouth...? Under my chin...? It didn't matter... All would be over in just a flash... So I put the pistol in my mouth... And... I tasted the cold steel barrel of the pistol... When I sat like that, it seems like everything was coming back... Like all of my memories just speed by... The longer it lasted, the shakier I became... I felt how my arms were trembling as I firmly closed my eyes... Regrets, sorrows...? It all rained down on me, and hit me like a brick every time, which is why I was determined to go on, because I couldn't take it anymore... Tears were rolling down my cheek and the only thought that could make it go away was the thought of everything ending soon... My finger was gently squeezing the trigger, ready when I am... But then... I felt a hand gently touching my shoulder... I didn't look... I didn't dare to look... I was too ashamed and scared to look... I felt how the hand moved to my arms and gently removed the pistol out of my mouth and saw it got hold of the pistol... And I was still shaking... I felt Blain's warm breathe in my neck... And a tear hitting my shoulder... It followed with more and more tears... When I finally had the guts to face him, I could see Blain right behind me, with red, soggy eyes... [br]*

[br]

Blain: Please..... Don't..... I need you too..... What am I gonna do without you.....? Don't leave me..... Please..... Don't leave me, Nic.....[br]

[br]

Nicole: \*sobs\* I... I just... [br]

[br]

*At that point, he burst out in tears, holding me close and cuddled me... I haven't seen him crying like that for a very long time... He wasn't crying like that when we first met after all these months... And then I couldn't hold it anymore... [br]*

[br]

Nicole: \*sobs\* I... I j-just can't take it anymore, Blain... A-All my life I've imagined growing old with you..... Together..... With Kaelyn..... Why was it never realized.....? Why.....? [br]

[br]

Blain: \*sobs\* I don't know..... I-I wish I knew..... But..... We have to stick together..... Like we always did.. I can't go on without you..... [br]

[br]

*It stayed silent for a very long time as we were holding each other close, crying our eyes out... We didn't let go of each other that night... He kept assuring me that everything is gonna be alright as he was still sobbing... He told me how much he loved me as kept on cuddling me throughout the night... I wish I could've said how much I loved him that night, but I couldn't talk... It felt as if something was stuck in my throat every time I wanted to say something to him... So I held him close and cuddled him as I kissed him every now and then to let him know I loved him dearly... [br]*

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

**[br]**

[br]

[br]

[br]



### 33 - Cherished memories

Vilani: Sergeant...?

Blain: Oh, hey Vilani...

Vilani: You've been absent for the last couple of weeks... Is everything alright...?

Blain: \*sighs\*

Vilani: How's Nicole doing...?

Blain: That's the thing... I don't know... She changed a lot... I barely even recognize her...

Vilani: Yeah... Well... You both went through a lot... I mean... She thought you died, you thought she died, and all of a sudden, you got reunited...

Blain: Yeah... She wants to stay with me, and she doesn't want me to go outside anymore... But... I have to... I can't just... Leave everybody like that, you know...?

Vilani: Hmm-mm...

Blain: And well... Nicole and I had fights about it... And at some point, she told me to leave...

Vilani: ... Oh... Then what happened...?

Blain: When I got back, I noticed she had a gun in her mouth... For a second there, she was determined to pull the trigger... But... I prevented that... She told me of how ashamed she felt, and she kept crying throughout the night... And well... This morning, we talked a lot... Worked things out... She told what she's been through... And eh... It's a lot... I could see she had a really hard time with it, and it left a mark on her for good... \*sighs\*

Vilani: \*nods\*

Blain: But still... Seeing her with a gun in her mouth, trying to pull the trigger... Seriously, it scared the living shoot out of me...

Vilani: I can imagine... So... Where's she now...?

Blain: Asleep...

Vilani: Good, good...

Blain: But still... I never thanked you for getting her out of the open... She told me it was you who found her... And she's really grateful...

Vilani: Hehe...

Blain: And so am I... I owe you a lot... So... If there's anything I can do for you, let me know...

Vilani: \*smiles\* I will...

Blain: Alright then...

**I was planning to make my way back to Nicole, but when I got up and walked away, I felt Vilani grabbed my arm...**

Vilani: Sergeant...?

Blain: Yeah?

Vilani: Actually... There is something you can do for me...

Blain: What's up...?

Vilani: ... Well... What was the last thing Regan said before he died...?

Blain: He eh... He asked me to keep an eye on you... And that he was really proud of you...

Vilani: \*smiles weakly\*

Blain: And that he loved you a lot...

Vilani: Heh... That does sound like him...

Blain: Sounds to me that you were really close together...

Vilani: Yeah... Regan and I went through a lot when we were kids... And he never stopped being overprotective, even after we got here...

Blain: Oh...?

Vilani: \*nods\*

Blain: ... What happened, if you don't mind me asking...?

Vilani: Well... Eh... I was 6 years old when a civil war broke out...

Blain: Where...?

Vilani: The continent of Ahthiambo all the way down south... And I came from an independent country called Sitembileq... It wasn't a big country but... Living there was... Difficult... And I grew up in a small village...

Blain: Sitembileq is one of the poorest countries in the world...

Vilani: I know... People killed each other for something as simple as a bag of rice...

Blain: Yeah... Go on...

Vilani: It's a complicated story... I didn't understand what it was all about when I was little, and truth be told, I still don't really know... A member of one tribe got killed and well, the rest followed... I saw how they cut off the limbs of people who weren't part of their tribe with a machete... And... Butchered little kids and babies and... Old people... Sick people...

Blain: I saw it on the news...

Vilani: Seeing it on the news is different then when you actually witnessed it... Impaling people on wooden poles...? Cutting the breasts of women off...? Cut open the belly of a pregnant woman and cut out the fetus...? They didn't show you that on the news did they...?

Blain: \*shakes no\*

Vilani: Yeah, thought so... They're always like... " Let's help these poor people by doing something..." So they come and help whenever they see fit... And then they leave... But they are closing their eyes for the genocides... They're closing their eyes for what is truly happening... They only see what they want to see... People see it on the news, but then the TV gets turned off and everyone forgets about it a few minutes later...

Blain: \*nods\* True... So..... How did you and Regan survived...?

Vilani: Regan and I were playing out in the field when we saw them coming... A hyena tribe...Armed with machetes, knives, axes, assault rifles and... Pretty much everything that can kill someone... So... We hid

between the crops and stayed as low as possible... And we heard everyone screaming and yelling and fighting... Gunfights... It just happened so fast... And then they just left...

Blain: Then what happened...?

Vilani: Eh... Regan and I went back once they left... They set a few houses on fire and... There was no one left alive... The whole village was littered with dead bodies... They maimed the women by cutting off their breasts and well... Pregnant females got their fetuses cut out... I saw that they cut off the limbs of my mother and sister... My father was decapitated... And well, Regan's parents... Same thing... \*sighs\*

Blain: It must have been hard...

Vilani: ... Yes...

Blain: ... Then what.....?

Vilani: We stayed for days in the village...

Blain: ...

Vilani: \*sighs\*

Blain: ... Doing what...?

Vilani: Holding on to our dead loved ones... Talking to them... Waiting for them to wake up... Then a peace corps arrived a week later... A bit too late... And we saw furries we've never seen before... Hedgehogs, echidna's, horses, armadillo's, you name it... It was scary... In fact, I think they were scarier than the hyena tribe... They talked a language we didn't understand... They tried and tried to get us to talk, but we didn't say anything...

Blain: And that's how you got here...?

Vilani: Yeah... Pretty much... We were taken care of in a foster family... Learned the language... Learning whole new things... Life got complicated ever since I got... And eh... Regan and I went to school... And we always got bullied... It's because we were different and they knew we came out of Sitembileq... A poor country... If they were actually watching the news, they knew what we had been through... So Regan and I stuck close together and he always came up for me... This one time in high school, he bashed someone into a coma when he saw someone was hitting me... But that also made me stronger on the inside... I started fighting whenever someone was bullying me... So... Heh... And then after high school, Regan and I joined the army...

Blain: I see...

Vilani: Heh... It's a strange thing actually...

Blain: What is...?

Vilani: When I was six, I saw people being butchered by machetes... And now, eighteen years later, I'm doing the same thing... Not with machetes and knives, but with Praetorian CCR-MA34/1 Inferno missiles and an Ataelian S281 GAU-8/A Gatling gun... \*sighs\*

Blain: Yeah...

Vilani: Heh... \*smiles weakly\*

Blain: ... How'd you managed to live with it for so many years...?

Vilani: \*shrugs\* It's just the way things are, sergeant...

Blain: Yeah... It's just the way things are, lieutenant...

Vilani: And now... Heh... I'm all alone now...

Blain: ... You're not alone... You got Jarod... And us... We'll stick together as a family... You know that... And it'll never change, no matter what...

Vilani: \*weak smile\*

Blain: \*sighs\*

Vilani: \*wipes face\*

Blain: You alright...?

Vilani: Y-Yeah, I-I'm fine... Heh... I just eh...

Blain: Hey, it's ok...

Vilani: Heh... Sarge...?

Blain: Yeah?

Vilani: Don't tell Jarod about this, ok.....? I never told anyone about this and... I wanna tell him myself when the time is right...

Blain: I understand...

Vilani: Thank you.....

Blain: \*smiles\*

Vilani: I eh... Whoa... L-Look at the time... I should b-be going... \*smiles nervously\*

Blain: You go then...

Vilani: Eh... Y-Yeah, heh...

**She got up from her chair and walked away rather quickly. She wasn't crying but I swear I could see her wiping a tear away when she got out...**

**I needed to check up on Nicole. She sleeps a lot nowadays but... I just needed to see how she was doing. Once I got back to my room, I noticed she wasn't in bed... Instead, she sat at the table with a cup of coffee, while she seemed be carried away in thoughts...**

Blain: ... Nic...?

Nicole: ...

Blain: Hey, Nic...?

Nicole: ...

Blain: You alright?

**As soon as I placed my hand on her shoulder, she shook up and looked startled at me...**

Nicole: Oh! Hey! Eh... Hey...

Blain: What's wrong...?

Nicole: So many things are wrong Blain... I just miss everyone... That's all... I miss Cody the most...

**Then I sat down on a chair and not long after that, she got on my lap, cuddling...**

Blain: \*sighs\*

Nicole: It's just so hard...

Blain: I know...

Nicole: Heh... When Cody and I were little, we got bored stiff on rainy days... So we took a mattress and

slide down the stairs... I always made him sit in front, just encase we would hit something on the way down... Then I wasn't the one who got hurt... And whenever he bumped his head against the closet, he was always mad at me, but continued to sit in front... Heh... We always had fights, but were solved like... Five minutes later... Then he wrote sorry on a piece of paper with only one R, and held it in front of my nose until I wasn't mad anymore... \*smiles\*

Blain: \*smiles\*

Nicole: Hehe... You remember that time when we busted him together with Eliza...? Near the lake...? A very long time ago...?

Blain: Hehehehe, yeah of course I do... We were making out not too far away...

Nicole: Yeah... She was like... The ugliest girl I've ever seen...

Blain: Haha! Yeah... And when they noticed us, Eliza jumped up and ran away except...

Nicole/Blain: She plunged in the lake! \*laughs\*

Nicole: Yeah! Oh man... Those faces were priceless...

Blain: Cody was pissed at us for weeks...

Nicole: \*sighs\* Good old days...

Blain: Yeah...

Nicole: Time went so fast, Blain... Look at us now...

Blain: We're boring adults now...

Nicole: Speak for yourself... \*smiles weakly\*

Blain: I'm far from boring as you might recall... \*smiles\*

Nicole: ... Oh yeah... Hehehe... The time we got lost in the forests... That was still your fault by the way...

Blain: No, it wasn't...

Nicole: You said you know where we were going...

Blain: Except I didn't KNOW where we were going...

Nicole: Which caused us to get lost...

Blain: Yeah... Well, still, we had fun...

Nicole: ... A lot... \*smiles\*

Blain: Hmm-mm... And then there was that waterfall...

Nicole: Yeah... I miss those days, Blain...

Blain: Me too... I wish I could just... Rewind time, you know...

Nicole: Then Kaelyn would have been still with us...

Blain: \*sighs\* Yeah... I can only imagine what she would look like today...

Nicole: \*nods slowly\*

**It stayed silent for a very long time as Nicole scratched me behind my ear... I always loved that when she did that... And I was gently rubbing her belly...**

Nicole: Blain...?

Blain: Yes...?

Nicole: Did you ever regret being with me.....?

Blain: No... Not a single day... Why'd you ask...?

Nicole: I don't know... It's just that... I messed a lot of things up through out my life and... I was wondering if I ever messed up with you...

Blain: Of course not... \*Kisses Nicole's cheek\*

Nicole: But... I did mess up with the guys who saved my life a couple of times...

Blain: ... Who...?

Nicole: Mahabi, Axel and Lattei... And it's true what Mahabi said... I've been ignoring them for so many weeks...

Blain: Yeah... Well... Things weren't really that easy when we first met again... Things can be set right with proper communication... We need to talk to them if they mean a lot to you...

Nicole: You really think so...?

Blain: \*nods\*

Nicole: But how...?

Blain: I'll go with you... I never thanked these guys...

Nicole: ... Never did I...

Blain: Hehe... Come on, let's go then...

### ***Meanwhile, in the flightdeck hangar...***

Vilani: ... And eh... That's basically it...

Jarod: ... Whoa...

Vilani: So now you know what happened when I was young...

Jarod: I never expected that...

Vilani: Yeah... So... It meant a lot when you came for me when I crashed... It reminded me of the eh... "Damsel in distress" thing you see in fairytales... \*smiles\*

Jarod: \*smiles and strokes his hand through her hair\*

Vilani: \*kisses Jarod\*

Radio: \*kssht\* All call-signs, be advised, UAV shows out that disgustingly sweet activity is undertaken at the moment. Cease and desist, out. \*kssht\*

Jarod: ... They mean us...

Vilani: ... Maybe.....

Jarod: Is there a way to turn your beacon off...?

Vilani: \*smiles and turns off gunship's beacon\*

Jarod: Now... Where were we...?

Vilani: Hmm-mm... \*kisses Jarod\*

Jarod: I love you so much, Vilani...

Vilani: Aww... I love you too, babe...

Radio: \*kssht\* Stop the acting and get off this frequency! Or get a room you two! Whaha!! \*kssht\*

Radio: \*kssht\* Shifty, you fracking twat!! Get off the fracking radio!! \*kssht\*

Jarod: You forgot to turn down the radio...

Vilani: \*turns radio off\* There...

Jarod: Hehehe...

Vilani: \*smiles nervously\*

Jarod: \*takes Vilani's top off\*

Vilani: Jarod, wait...

Jarod: Hm...?

Vilani: Eh... I don't know how to say this but... T-This'll be the first time for me...

Jarod: You serious...?

Vilani: \*nods quickly\* Yeah... And...

Jarod: Hey, it's ok... If you wanna wait, then... We'll wait... \*pouts\*

Vilani: ...No.....

Jarod: No, it's ok if you wa- Wait, what?

Vilani: ... I wanna go through with this, Jarod... I want you to be my first...

Jarod: ... You're really serious, aren't you...?

Vilani: Yes... But... Will it... You know... hurt.....?

Jarod: I won't bite hard if that's what you mean...

Vilani: Jarod, I'm serious.....

Jarod: Don't worry, babe... You'll do great.....

Vilani: I'm kinda nervous...

Jarod: Don't be...

Vilani: \*nods\*

Radio: \*kssht\* LET'S GET READY TO PAAAAAAAAAARTAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAY!!!! \*kssht\*

Vilani/Jarod: Whoa!!!

Radio: \*kssht\* Whahahahaha!! \*kssht\*

Jarod: I thought you turned down the radio!

Vilani: I did! It's you're potable radio!

Jarod: Damn it... Let's go somewhere else... Leave every radio in here...

Vilani: My room...?

Jarod: \*nods\* Sure...

Vilani: \*smiles\*

Jarod: I swear, I'm gonna kill Shifty...

Vilani: Let's not ruin the moment here, ok...? \*smiles\*

Jarod: You're right, you're right...

Vilani: Let's go.....

Jarod: ... He's so dead...

## 34 - Heartbeats...

Blain: This is the place...? [br]

Nicole: \*nods\* Yeah... [br]

Blain: Alright... \*knocks on door\* [br]

Mahabi: Go away!! [br]

Blain: ... \*bangs on door\* [br]

Mahabi: frack off already!! [br]

Nicole: They're really are pissed..... [br]

Blain: Yeah... \*bangs on door\* [br]

Mahabi: Look, Jenny!! I told you to- [br]

[br]

*I got behind Blain as soon as I noticed the door was opening up. Truth be told, I was kinda scared but when the door finally opened up, I saw Mahabi standing in the doorway looking baffled at Blain... [br]*

*[br]*

Mahabi: ... You're not Jenny... [br]

Blain: ... No. Sergeant Blain, 506<sup>th</sup> regiment... [br]

Mahabi: ... Mahabi... [br]

[br]

*Then I peeked around Blain's shoulder and looked at Mahabi. I think he already noticed me but... You could see he was thinking... [br]*

*[br]*

Nicole: Hi... [br]

Mahabi: ... Hey Nic... ..... Why are you here...? [br]

Nicole: I eh..... \*sighs\* [br]

Mahabi: ... Hm...? [br]

Blain: Nicole got something to say to the three of you... But... I got something to say to you guys as well...

[br]

[br]

Nicole: I mentioned Blain a lot... [br]

Mahabi: Whoa, wait... You're "Blain the dead boyfriend" Blain...?[br]

Blain: \*smiles and nods\* [br]

Mahabi: Oh whoa... [br]

Nicole: Hehe... [br]

[br]

Mahabi: Well eh... Eh... Don't mention it... So eh... You guys wanna come inside...? Axel and Lattei would love to see you... [br]

[br]

Nicole: Yeah, of course... [br]

*[br]*

*So we got inside. I saw Axel sitting on a chair, staring in blank space and judging by his expression, he*



*was probably wondering where those black spots came from when you stare long enough... Then not long after that, Lattei joined too... I flopped on a bed as the others were taking their seats... [br]*

Lattei: Hey Nic. [br]

Nicole: Hi... [br]

Axel: \*glares at Nicole\* [br]

[br]

Nicole: \*sighs\* Guys... I eh... I just wanna say that... I'm sorry for what has happened... I mean... I'm worried about so many things and... A few weeks ago, while I was in the sickbay, I found out that Blain was still alive... And... I was so shocked by that and... Well... It's difficult... It wasn't easy for him too... [br]

Mahabi: ... So it really is him then... \*looks at Blain\*[br]

Blain: \*nods\*[br]

Nicole: Yeah... So many things happened in the past few weeks... Blain and I both changed dramatically and... It didn't took long before our differences clashed with each other... We had fights and arguments... But... We managed to work things out, even though we may never fully understand the gaps in our differences... I hope you guys can forgive me for what has happened... And I understand if you don't... I know what's it's like when someone turns your back on you... I know all too well... But... I've said what I wanted to say... So... Thanks for hearing me out...[br]

[br]

*Then it stayed silent for a long time... [br]*

[br]

Mahabi: Well... I didn't know but... I've seen you around with him... And I thought you forgot about us you know...[br]

[br]

Nicole: I know... But really, I didn't... How can I forget you guys...? You guys are my friends...[br]

[br]

Axel: ... Friends.....? [br]

Nicole: Well... Yeah... Of course..... We've been through a lot and... Laughed together and... Cried together... It wasn't always easy but... We got through, right...? [br]

[br]

Axel: ..... \*hugs Nicole\* [br]

Nicole: \*smiles\* [br]

Axel: Friend...! [br]

Nicole: You can let go now, Axel... [br]

Axel: I will... Friend... \*smiles\*[br]

Nicole: Silly... \*smiles\*[br]

[br]

Blain: I eh... I got something to say as well... I just wanna thank you for looking out for her... And that you guys protected her... And... I don't really know how to thank you so... If there's anything I can do for you guys, just let me know... I'm forever in your debt...[br]

[br]

Lattei: Well, no problem... We had our up's and down's but... Like Nicole said, we got through... [br]

[br]

Nicole: \*nods\* [br]

Axel: I just hope this will end very soon... [br]

Blain: ... Yeah...[br]

Lattei: Which reminds me... Do you know how the war is going...? [br]

Blain: Well... In a nutshell... [br]

Lattei: ... Yes...? [br]

Blain: The end is in sight... [br]

Lattei: ... What? [br]

Blain: Yeah... [br]

Lattei: But... How? I heard the MNAF got obliterated... [br]

Blain: Well yeah, we did... [br]

Mahabi: ... Soooo... [br]

[br]

Blain: Well, it's not a secret anymore... The MNAF was scattered apart by the GUN, and they made sure we couldn't communicate in order for us to arrange a counter assault. At some point, it was inevitable for us to loose the war after just a month, but that didn't mean we sit still and watched how everything was destroying itself. Someone we found, had a lot of inside information of GUN, and knew how they operated. So we assassinated the head of GUN, and a mercenary for hire who seemed to know a lot... Seeing as the humans already have an instable government, the hierarchy will collapse, and once it has collapsed, people will fight for the power. And as history shows, when people fight for power, it inevitably comes to an end... The human regime will collapse like a house of cards and all we can do now is to watch how it will collapse... Might take a few more months... Or maybe it's over tomorrow... [br]

[br]

Mahabi: ... You serious...? [br]

Blain: Dead serious... Satellite photo's show that the GUN is retreating back to the north... I'd give it a couple of weeks and then we can start looking for our loved ones... [br]

[br]

Mahabi: Heh... \*smiles\* [br]

[br]

*Looking around at everyone who started to smile was something I'll never forget. I looked at everyone, and realized we finally made it. That we were safe for good. But what truly got me, was that when I looked to my left, I still saw Blain sitting next to me. In the flesh, alive and well. And even though we lost a lot of lost ones, I never gave up hope that they will show up one day, just like Blain did... [br]*

[br]

*Hours and hours passed by while the five of us just kept on talking about all sorts of things. At some point, Blain got called away to assist someone at the base. I stayed with the guys to talk... At some point, the subject changed to Terry and Ceylan... The smiles on everyone's faces started to disappear... There was something I needed to say to Mahabi... So the two of us went somewhere else... [br]*

[br]

Mahabi: ... What's wrong...? [br]

[br]

*There wasn't an easy way for me to tell... But I had to... It was difficult for me to do so, but I owed that to her... So I took his hands in mine... [br]*

[br]

Nicole: Mahabi... [br]

Mahabi: Yeah...? [br]

Nicole: I eh... [br]

Mahabi: ... Hm...? [br]

Nicole: I talked to Ceylan the night she died...[br]

Mahabi: Oh...? [br]

Nicole: Yeah... I wanted her to understand what I felt for her but... She didn't... And... I don't blame her...

[br]

[br]

Mahabi: \*nods\* [br]

Nicole: But... She said she liked someone else... I didn't want her to... Because... I wanted her for myself... I was jealous... And... She wanted to tell someone that she wanted to be with him while she could, and say everything she ever wanted to say to him... And... That someone is you, Mahabi... She really liked you... Except... She never had the chance to say that herself... To you... And... I felt obliged to say that to you on behalf of her... And it's something I owed her, even though it's still painful to me... [br]

[br]

Mahabi: ... I see... [br]

Nicole: So... Now you know... [br]

Mahabi: \*nods\* Yeah... [br]

[br]

*A few weeks passed by again... The situation only got better and better by the day... Those few weeks were the happiest days I ever had... Being with the guys who looked after me, for better or worse, and with the guy I loved the most, who I thought was dead... But every once in a while, I couldn't help but to think of Terry, Ceylan and Rachel... I really wished they could have seen this... The end of the war... And I miss them... I miss Terry's goofy laugh whenever he was telling a joke... Ceylan's pretty smile... Rachel's innocent face... But... I hope that wherever they are, they've found peace... And I accepted the fact that they've passed away... But I couldn't accept Rachel's... I didn't know whether she lived or died... And that was something that was still a hard to accept for me... But the idea that she's being taken care of by humans was something that comforted me a bit... I don't think that they'll execute her for being with us... But that doesn't mean she was safe from everything else happening... I hope that wherever she is, that she doesn't have to experience it anymore... [br]*

[br]

*I went regularly over to the sickbay to let my wounds being taken care of. The cuts I had on my face were healing quite nicely, but for the last few days, it started to sting. I met Rico who was a medical officer, in service of Blain's regiment. I saw him before, but I never knew his name. While I was sitting there on a stretcher, Rico took care of my wounds... [br]*

[br]

Rico: This might sting a bit... [br]

Nicole: \*gasps\* Ow!! [br]

Rico: You should have come sooner. It looks as if it gets infected. [br]

Nicole: \*nods\* [br]

Rico: I'll clean it up, and place a bandage on it. If it gets worse, you'll know where to find me. [br]

[br]

Nicole: Thanks Rico... [br]

Rico: No problem, that's what I'm here for... [br]

[br]

*So Rico cleaned up the wound and patched it all up. I felt better after that... [br]*

[br]

Blain: All done? [br]

Rico: Yes sir, she's good to go. [br]

Blain: Rico? [br]

Rico: Yes sir? [br]

Blain: Drop the formalities and manners here, alright...? Just call me Blain... [br]

Rico: Yes sir. [br]

Blain: ... No, Blain... [br]

Rico: Right, sorry sir. It's something I still gotta get used to... Hehe... [br]

Blain: Hehe, thanks Rico. Take care. [br]

[br]

*The moment we wanted to leave, I saw Shifty barging through the doors, carrying someone... He ran as fast as he could, while yelling for Rico, and as he passed by, I saw he was carrying Vilani... [br]*

[br]

Shifty: RICO!!! RICOOOOOO!!! WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU?!![br]

Rico: Whoa! The hell happened?![br]

Shifty: I don't know man!! She was swaying and fell down!! [br]

[br]

*The two of them got to the back where Shifty placed Vilani on a stretcher... Blain and I stood at a distance to see what was going on... [br]*

[br]

Vilani: Urgh... I feel like shoot..... [br]

Rico: What happened?[br]

Shifty: I don't know!! Jarod told me Vilani was nauseous for a few weeks!! [br]

Rico: Are you nauseous right now? [br]

Vilani: \*nods slowly\* [br]

Shifty: You don't think it has... Something to do with that... That virus right...? [br]

[br]

*Vilani's eyes widened all of a sudden once Shifty mentioned that... Rico took a small flashlight from his pocket and shined in her eyes. He checked her blood pressure as well... [br]*

[br]

Rico: No, I don't think so...[br]

Shifty: I'll go get Jarod!! [br]

Rico: Vital signs are looking normal, Vilani... What else you got? [br]

Vilani: Serious headaches..... And... I'm dizzy sometimes.....[br]

[br]

Rico: Are you dizzy right now...? [br]

Vilani: ... Yeah.....[br]

Rico: Hmm-mm... [br]

[br]

*Rico lifts her shirt up to expose her tummy and listened to it with a stethoscope... Not long after that, Shifty got back with Jarod... [br]*

[br]

Jarod: Vilani![br]

Vilani: Hey babe.....[br]

Jarod: You ok?![br]

Vilani: I felt better.....[br]

Rico: You better stay there, Jarod. [br]

Jarod: What the hell happened?![br]

Blain: I don't know... Shifty just barged in with her... [br]

Rico: You experiencing backaches...? [br]

Vilani: I had, yesterday.....[br]

Rico: Okay... Eh... Does this hurt? [br]

Vilani: \*shakes no\*[br]

Rico: How about this? [br]

Vilani: No..... [br]

Rico: You feeling tired...? [br]

Vilani: \*nods\*... [br]

Rico: Are you hungry all the time...? \*smiles\*[br]

Vilani: \*sighs\* I admit I ate a lot the past few days... I might have gained some weight.....[br]  
[br]

*Hearing all those symptoms was something that sounded very familiar... Rico checked her stomach again with the stethoscope and felt a specific region of her belly... At some point, he looked up to her and smiled... For some reason, I was smiling as well, knowing what caused those symptoms... [br]  
[br]*

Rico: You eh... Hehe... [br]

Jarod: What, what's wrong?![br]

Rico: There's isn't any subtle way for me to tell you this so eh... I'll just say it... [br]

Vilani: What is it.....? [br]

Rico: ... You're pregnant...[br]

Vilani: ... [br]

Jarod: ... What? [br]

Vilani: ... You sure...? [br]

Rico: Hmm-mm... [br]

Vilani: B-But... How do you know for sure...? [br]

Rico: Well... It takes about 3 months before the fetus is fully grown. And judging by the position of the fetus and estimated size, I reckon that you're pregnant for about 4 or 5 weeks, and eh... By now, the fetus is nothing but a very small kitten... You can hear its slow heart beat... \*smiles\*[br]  
[br]

Vilani: O-Oh whoa... [br]

Rico: Here, listen. [br]

[br]

*Rico placed the stethoscope on Vilani's head as he kept the end of it near her stomach. He moved around a bit... Vilani had a big smile on her face as her eyes were getting soggy... I looked at Jarod and he was baffled... [br]  
[br]*

[br]

Vilani: I-I'm gonna be a mommy...! [br]

Jarod: \*smiles nervously\*[br]

Rico: Who's the lucky dad...? [br]

[br]

Vilani: Hehe... Jarod is... \*smiles and blushes\*[br]

Jarod: \*blushes\*[br]

[br]

Rico: You're gonna be a dad of a healthy kitten, Jarod... [br]

Jarod: I-I don't know what to say... I-I-I'm speechless... [br]

Blain: Yeah, we noticed that... Hehehehe... Congratulations, the both of you... [br]

Nicole: Congratulations... \*smiles\*[br]

Shifty: Hehehehe... I never thought I'd live to see this day man... Congratulations...[br]

Vilani: Thanks... \*smiles\*[br]

Rico: Come on, listen to your kitten's heart beat... [br]

Jarod: Oh! Yeah! Of course! [br]

[br]

*Jarod got next to Vilani and kneeled right besides her... The moment that Rico placed the stethoscope on his head, Jarod's baffled expression turned into a big smile... He still had trouble to believe it but... He really was gonna be a father... It warmed my heart to see those two... Hehe... [br]*

[br]

Jarod: O-Oh whoa... The heart beat is very slow... Is that supposed to be like that...?[br]

Rico: \*nods\* [br]

Jarod: I-I'm gonna be dad... Oh whoa... How cool is that?! Whaha![br]

[br]

*Blain and I looked at Jarod and Vilani... They embraced and kissed each other as they both looked very happy... Jarod kept rubbing gently over Vilani's stomach... It warmed my heart to see them like that... Blain and I were like that when I was pregnant of Kaelyn... [br]*

[br]

[br]

Blain: Reminds you of something, doesn't it...? [br]

Nicole: \*smiles and nods\* [br]

Blain: Hehe... Come on... Let's leave these two alone... [br]

Nicole: \*smiles\* [br]

Blain: You coming Shifty...? [br]

Shifty: B-b-but sarge! I can't leave my homeboy-[br]

Blain: Come on Shifty... [br]

Shifty: ... \*bites upper lip\*[br]

[br]

*And so we walked out of the sickbay... Before we got out of the sickbay, I looked back at Jarod and Vilani as they were kissing each other again... The two of them looked so happy... [br]*

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

[br]

## 35 - Ashes to ashes, we all fall down...

Three weeks have passed by ever since then. And for us, things couldn't get any better. Vilani found out she was gonna be a mother, and Jarod would be a proud father... Nicole and I were happy together... The war would be over soon and we could leave this place... And then we could finally start looking for our loved ones... After so many months, things finally started to brighten up for us. But for some reason, I couldn't shake the idea that something big was about to happen. I didn't know why, or what caused that feeling, but I just knew it... At first, I thought that I started to get paranoid, seeing as everything worked out so flawlessly over the weeks... But as days passed by, the feeling didn't go away... At that point, I knew something serious was about to happen... In a few days, my suspicions became true... And it was something we never saw coming... [br]

[br]

One morning, I got summoned over to COMScann, where everyone else was already waiting. I could see by the looks on their faces that things were seriously wrong... [br]

[br]

Blain: Morning, Scyth... [br]

Scyth: Hey Blain... [br]

Blain: What's going on? [br]

Scyth: \*sighs\* Well, in a nutshell... Over the past few weeks, GUN troops were falling back to the north. They probably know about Miller and Zakhaev by now... [br]

[br]

Blain: Yeah, go on...[br]

Scyth: But eh... They were falling back... But not retreating... [br]

Blain: Whadda ya mean...? [br]

Scyth: They fell back to the north to regroup... And now their on their way back... And now they are coming straight for us... They know who killed Miller and Zakhaev...[br]

[br]

Blain: ... What.....? [br]

Scyth: Yeah... And I bet their pretty pissed about Miller and Zakhaev being dead...[br]

Blain: But... How's that possible...? [br]

Scyth: I don't know... Maybe someone snitched us... That's the only thing I can come up with right now... [br]

[br]

[br]

Blain: ... You think Jones is behind this.....? [br]

Scyth: ... [br]

Blain: ... Well.....?[br]

Scyth: ... No... If he went to GUN, he would be up against the wall... It can't be Jones... Jones is with the ICA after all... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... fracking hell... So now what...? [br]

Scyth: We still might have a chance... [br]

Blain: Talk to me... [br]

Scyth: \*sighs\* UAV showed that a small GUN reconnaissance force is scattered throughout the outskirts of Azerbaijan, trying to find our position... They probably found something, otherwise they wouldn't hang around all night... If they locate the base, GUN will send their full military arsenal to obliterate us and everyone who's in this base... So we need to take out the reconnaissance force before they find the base and give our position away... [br]

[br]

Blain: But why...? They wouldn't gain anything... What is it that they're after...? [br]

Scyth: Think... [br]

Blain: ... [br]

Scyth: They're after us, Blain... They know you're a lifeform too... [br]

Blain: ... What.....? [br]

Scyth: I'm sorry..... I had no choice.....[br]

[br]

Blain: ... We don't stand a chance, do we...? [br]

Scyth: No... I-I don't know... I really don't... [br]

Blain: \*sighs\* [br]

Scyth: This is risky shoot, Blain... Very risky... [br]

Blain: It always has been... When do we leave...? [br]

Scyth: Right now... [br]

[br]

**The squad leaders assembled their squads in the briefing room. People were running all over the place. Six squads in total were going, including mine. We received our data and objectives from COMScann and everything was stored and displayed on our HUD... Moments later, the door of the briefing room opened up... And Jones walked in, packed up with his own weapons and gear... [br]**

**[br]**

Blain: ... The hell do you think you're doing...? [br]

Jones: ... Fighting along side with you guys... [br]

Blain: Out of the question. GUN wants you the most. If they see you out there, you'll be dead for sure.

[br]

[br]

**Jones took off his glasses and wiped it clean... He puts them back on and glared at me... [br]**

**[br]**

Jones: With all due respect "sergeant", but I believe that this is my fight as well... I just wanna get rid of the GUN just as much as you do... Sitting around isn't helping me... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... [br]

[br]

Jones: Let me do something useful... Please... [br]

Blain: \*sighs\* [br]

[br]

**I looked at Jones for a short moment and I nodded to him to take his seat. Jones took out his weapons and inspected them... [br]**

**[br]**

Shifty: Those pistol rounds don't look like standard ones... [br]



Jones: 'Scuse me? [br]

Shifty: Those pistol rounds...[br]

Jones: Oh! Yeah, their not... Their hollow pointed .45 ACP rounds... Doesn't inflict much damage as full cased ones... Their still deadly if you hit someone in the head though... [br]

[br]

Shifty: Hehehe... [br]

[br]

**About fifteen minutes later, we were ready... Armed with our weapons, we walked through the corridors... It must have been an impressive sight... People were watching us how we left, and all we did was looking at those who were watching us. The large doors opened up and we got through the hangars... Then another one opens up ahead, and we felt the blistering cold hitting our faces... Snow flakes got blown inside, hitting our bodies... And once we got outside, every squad split up in different directions, sweeping through the streets like a ghost, the bringer of death... [br]**

[br]

**It didn't take long before we found the GUN reconnaissance squad. Or at least, we thought so... The frequencies of their equipment gave away their position... We joined another squad who investigated that... But once we arrived, we didn't see anything... No human soldiers whatsoever... I got in a building to get a good overview and to see if anyone else had identified enemy activity while Jarod, Rico, Shifty, Tavish, Scyth and Jones stayed outside... No one reported hostile activity... This was getting weirder by the minute... [br]**

[br]

Blain: COMScann, this is Bravo-3, can I get a UAV at my position? Over. [br]

Radio: Copy, UAV is online and transmitting... [br]

[br]

Blain: Are you sure we're risking our necks for something...?[br]

Radio: No contacts are visible at the moment, Bravo-3. [br]

Blain: Then where the hell is that frequency coming from?![br]

Radio: We're working on that. Stand-By. [br]

[br]

~~~[br]

[br]

Shifty: What's taking the sarge so long...? [br]

Jarod: I don't know... We better sit tight... Something is definitely wrong... [br]

Shifty: *sighs and cycles through the HUD data* [br]

Jarod: Whoa, whoa, whoa, the hell just happened...? What'd I do...?![br]

Tavish: The radio and data is distorted...[br]

Shifty: That wasn't me...![br]

Jones: We're being jammed... [br]

Tavish: *twitches ears* [br]

Scyth: What, what is it?![br]

Tavish: Oh frack!!! INCOMING!!!! [br]

[br]

Then all of a sudden, without warning, a massive EMP hit us... Every electronically device got fried... We lost radio contact with the others and couldn't see our HUD displays anymore, which made us very vulnerable... Disoriented by the sudden electro magnetic pulse, I tried to hold my balance... As I was staring outside the window, I could see something vague sneaking past a

wall... It resembled a soap bubble in the form of a human... The sun shined on it, which revealed it... It took me a while to distinguish it and it was very hard to keep up with... But then I noticed it kneeled and took his aim... I didn't hesitate for a second and took my aim on his head and immediately pulled the trigger... There was a big blood splatter on the wall, and the human posture started to flicker... Once he was down on the ground, I noticed he had a special suit... Active camo... shoot... [br]

[br]

Blain: IT'S AN AMBUSH!!! THEY KNOW WHERE WE ARE!!! GET OU-[br]

[br]

And then suddenly, something hit the building with a tremendous force... Debris flies all over the place and everything looked like it went in slow-motion... I got blown out of the building, and hit the ground in an unfortunate way... I only heard a noisy beep as I saw everyone standing next to me and yelling... I couldn't hear them and everything still went in slow-motion... I was so disoriented by the blast... I noticed everyone ran away in different directions from the sudden chaos... I heard the vague machine gun fire rattling through the streets as I got pulled to safety by Jones... At that point, I blacked out... [br]

[br]

Jones: Sergeant?!! Sergeant?!!! Stay with me!! Stay with me, for fracks sake!! shoot!!!

SCYYYYYYYTH!!! Take the sergeant back before we loose him!! [br]

[br]

~~~[br]

[br]

Shifty: shoot!! shoot!! shoot!! shoot!! shoot!! shoot!! shoot!! shoot!! shoot!! shoot!! shoot!! shoot!! shoot!! shoot!! shoot!![br]

[br]

Jarod: Less talking, Shifty, more running!! [br]

Shifty: Where the frack are we going anyway?!! Where the hell is everybody?!! [br]

Jarod: The frack should I know, dude?!! The only way to-!![br]

Shifty: You're left!!! Get down!!! [br]

Jarod: frack!!! [br]

Shifty: Go!! Go!! Go!! [br]

Jarod: Damn!! That was close!! [br]

Shifty: This is fracking madness, Jarod!! The hell are we doing out here?!![br]

Jarod: No idea man, just keep moving!!! [br]

[br]

Shifty: \*pants\*[br]

Jarod: Whoa, whoa, whoa!! Stop, stop!! [br]

Shifty: What?!![br]

Jarod: Get down!! \*pulls Shifty down behind a wall\* [br]

Shifty: What, what is it?!![br]

Jarod: Sssh... \*twitches ear\* [br]

Shifty: You hear something...? [br]

Jarod: \*nods\* [br]

Shifty: ... [br]

Jarod: Battlewalkers... [br]

Shifty: Oh frack, we're gonna die...! We're gonna die...!! shoot...!! We don't stand a chance against these fracking things...!! This is fracking suicide...!! What the hell are we supposed to do...?!! This is NOT

worth fighting for, Jarod...!! Not worth to fight nor die for...!! You're gonna be a father, Jarod...!! Think of Vilani...!! Think of you're kid, for fracks sake, Jarod...!![br]

[br]

Jarod: I'm doing that right now, Shifty... [br]

Shifty: I'm scared shootless here, man...!! Never before was there an attack so close to the base...!! And even if we defeat these guys, they'll just send reinforcements over and over again until there's nothing left of us!! \*wheezes\* It's no fracking use!![br]

[br]

Jarod: \*grabs Shifty collar and firmly pushes him against the wall\* [br]

Shifty: frack you!! frack you!! Lemme go!! Lemme go for fracks sake!! [br]

Jarod: Cool it!! You're having a panic attack!![br]

Shifty: \*gets out his pistol and firmly presses it against Jarod's forehead\* [br]

Jarod: Whoa!! What the frack?!! \*let's go off Shifty\* [br]

[br]

Shifty: \*stares in Jarod's eyes while still aiming at his forehead\*[br]

Jarod: Dude... It's me...[br]

Shifty: ... [br]

Jarod: \*shakes head\* No... Just... J-Just... No... [br]

Shifty: \*Lowers gun\* I-I'm sorry... I-I... [br]

Jarod: You did NOT just aim a gun against my head... \*sobs\* You didn't...[br]

Shifty: I-I'm sorry man, I was tripping... I was tripping, alright...?[br]

Jarod: \*shakes head\* It's me dude...[br]

Shifty: I-I'm scared, Jarod... frack... [br]

Jarod: I-I know... I know... [br]

Shifty: Oh shoot, oh shoot, oh shoot!! I can hear those fracking battlewalkers coming closer, man!! [br]

[br]

Jarod: D-Don't panic, Shifty... Stay cool... Don't ru- [br]

Shifty: frack!!! \*runs away\* [br]

Jarod: SHIFTY!!![br]

[br]

***In the sudden burst of panic that Shifty felt, he ran away in the opposite direction of where the battlewalkers were coming in. It was inevitable for one of the battlewalkers to see Shifty running away... Jarod watched how Shifty ran towards a building, as it got blown up... He witnessed how Shifty got tossed up in the air like a ragdoll, and landed on the street, with severe burns as chunks of flesh was ripped off all over his body... Pieces of shattered windows penetrated Shifty's entire body... Jarod saw how Shifty reached out for him from a distance... At that point, Jarod couldn't care anymore if he could die... He ran as fast as he could to Shifty... [br]***

**[br]**

Jarod: Oh shoot!! Oh shoot!!! [br]

Shifty: I-I can't feel m-my legs, d-dude...[br]

[br]

***Then all of a sudden, massive explosion after explosions occurred... Jarod looked up surprised and noticed the battlewalkers got annihilated... [br]***

**[br]**

Jarod: Gunships!! That'll be you're ticket out of here!! You're gonna be alright!! Outlaw, Outlaw, this is bravo-3, do you copy?!! Outlaw, Outlaw, this is Bravo-3, do you copy?!!![br]

[br]

Shifty: Th-Their moving a-away... E-Everyone retreated a-already...[br]

Jarod: ... They forgot about us... [br]

Shifty: \*breathes heavily\*[br]

[br]

Jarod: shoot!!!! You're gonna be alright!! Rico's should be around here somewhere!! He'll patch you up!! You're gonna be ok!! Ricooooooo!!! RICO!!! RICO!!![br]

[br]

Shifty: P-Patch me up...?! L-Look at me, you dumb f-frack...!! [br]

[br]

Jarod: RICO!!! [br]

Shifty: N-No...! No m-medical treatment...! You're gonna have to k-kill me...[br]

Jarod: What?!! [br]

Shifty: R-Reinforcements a-are coming in c-closer, J-Jarod... [br]

Jarod: frack no!! NO!!! I'll carry you if I have to!![br]

Shifty: You're g-gonna die too if y-you try s-saving me... I-It's too la-late for that now... \*starts sobbing\*  
...J-Just put the f-fracking gun to my head an-and p-pull the trigger... N-Nobody will kn-know... Ju-Just you an-and... a-and me...[br]

[br]

Jarod: ... Pull the trigger and bail...? [br]

Shifty: \*nods slowly\* Y-Yeah...[br]

[br]

**Jarod hesitated to reach out for his pistol... He removed the buckle of his holster and slowly pulled his gun out... Gently removed the safety and clenched his teeth, hesitating...[br]**

[br]

Jarod: \*sobs\* You did this to yourself, you stupid frack!!! You always frack things up and I get to set everything straight!! [br]

[br]

Shifty: L-Like those d-days back at b-bootcamp...? [br]

Jarod: \*nods slowly\* ...Yeah... Like those days back at bootcamp... [br]

Shifty: \*sobs\* C-come on J-Jarod... Please d-do it... I'd d-do it for you... I'd do it for y-you... P-Please...  
D-Don't let m-me suffer I-like this.....[br]

[br]

Jarod: ... I love you, you fracking shootbag... [br]

Shifty: I-I love you too... I'm sorry... I'm so sorry man... [br]

Jarod: Everything is gonna be ok now... [br]

Shifty: \*nods\* ... Ye-Yeah... I know... ..... I know.....[br]

[br]

**Shifty closed his eyes as Jarod firmly pressed his pistol to Shifty's forehead. He hesitated for a short moment... Then he pulled the trigger... Jarod yelled out his agony shortly after he pulled the trigger... He stares at Shifty's lifeless body for a short while, and then just ran while tears were flowing down his face... [br]**

## 36 - No alternative...

*I came out of the shower... Dried myself off... And noticed the mirror in the bathroom was damp and moistly from the hot steam... After I got dressed, I wiped a towel over the mirror to see myself... Once I saw my own reflection, I noticed it was staring at me... In my eyes... But for some reason, that wasn't me I was looking at... She seemed younger... Me when I was 19 years old... Her head tilted a little over to the right and kept on staring at me...*

Mirror: ... You look familiar.....

Nicole: ... What are you talking about...?

Mirror: It's like... Looking in a mirror... Only... Not...

Nicole: ... B-bu-but... Y-You are me... You're m-my reflection...

Mirror: You're wrong... I'm not you...

Nicole: Then... Who are you...?

Mirror: Someone with dignity and self-esteem... Someone who is proud for what I've accomplished throughout my life, against all odds...

Nicole: But... You're me... Wait... W-what the hell am I doing...? I-I'm talking to a mirror...

Mirror: No, you're talking to me... You looked like me a long time ago... And when I look at you now, I see nothing but an empty void...

Nicole: ... The hell are you saying...?

Mirror: ... Are you ever thinking of telling Blain...?

Nicole: ... T-Tell him what...?

Mirror: You know all too well what I mean with that...

Nicole: ... I...

Mirror: You know what happened with Terry... Don't you feel cheap now...

Nicole: B-but... T-Terry loved me...

Mirror: Bullshoot!! Terry didn't give a shoot about you!! All he cared for was having a quick frack and you were the perfect victim for it!! How the hell could you do that?!! Don't you have any self-respect anymore?!!

Nicole: ... I-I...

Mirror: What about Ceylan?!

Nicole: ... Wh-What about her...?

Mirror: You kept clinging on to her like she was your life-support or something!! What about my daughter?!! What about my Blain?!! Are you so fracking selfish you don't even see it?!! You're so fracking pathetic!!

Nicole: I-I... I didn't know B-Blain was s-still alive b-back then...

Mirror: Bullshoot!! That doesn't give you the right to do it anyway!!

Nicole: N-No... B-But...

Mirror: \*shakes head\* Dad would turn over in his grave if he saw you now... To see what you've

become... It fracking disgusts me to see what I've become... You stupid country matters... How the hell could you that to ME...?!

Nicole: \*sobs\* Shut up...

Mirror: Shutting up wont make it go away...!! One day, Blain will find out...! And he'll say the exact same things I'm saying to you right now...

Nicole: \*sobs\* Shut up...!

Mirror: You almost made the right decision... It's not too late to pick up Blain's gun and put it in you're mouth again... It's never too late for that...

Nicole: \*sobs\* Shut up!!

*All of a sudden, I started punching the mirror... Over, and over... And over again... Until the mirror was nothing more but pieces of shattered glass... I felt how my hands were shaking, and when I looked down, I saw they were severely bleeding... My hands were cut open... I started to walk back slowly while staring in disbelieve at the broken mirror... Once I felt I've reached the wall, I let myself down slowly... And sat in the corner while I felt how tears were rolling down my face... I noticed how hard it became to breathe, while I slowly choked down in my own tears... I closed my eyes and wished that everything just vanished, that everything was over...*

Kaelyn: I forgive you...

*I felt that someone was touching my face... As I looked up, I saw a beautiful young girl looking at me... She wiped a tear out of my face and sat down next to me, with her arms around my shoulders and held on to me... And I realized it was Kaelyn... It didn't take that long for me to realize... I was baffled at first but then... I firmly held on to her while I closed my eyes and cried...*

Kaelyn: Don't cry..... Everything is going to be alright.....

Nicole: \*sobs\* I know sweetie... I-I know.....

Kaelyn: I forgive you, mommy.....

Nicole: \*sobs\* My little darling..... I love you so much.....

Kaelyn: I love you too..... Don't ever let go of me.....

Nicole: \*sobs\* I won't..... I never will..... Everything is gonna be alright now..... Sssh... Don't listen to her... Don't listen to her.....

*We cuddled like that for a long time..... As soon as I opened my eyes, Kaelyn wasn't in my arms anymore... Instead, I saw the younger me, the one I saw in the mirror, standing in front of me... With pieces of glass all over her face while her face was cut open...*

Mirror: My daughter might forgive you for what you did to her... But I won't... I'll never forgive what you did to me... I never will...

*And with that, she walked off... Disappearing in the dark... While I was left behind...*

*I opened my eyes... And noticed I was in the sickbay with Blain... I was on a chair next to him, while I was cuddling him... I must have fallen asleep... I looked at Blain and kept asking myself what*

*happened... Then I remembered... A human and Scyth came in 6 hours ago, carrying Blain... And I stayed with him while they were trying to save his life... I heard in the sudden chaos something that sounded like a bomb that hit the building he was in, and he fell two storeys down... But no matter how many times I whispered in his ear that I loved him, he never opened his eyes that night...*

*Hours and hours passed by while I didn't moved an inch. It turned night, and I was starting to become exhausted... At some point, I heard the doors opening, and someone was walking through the doors, taking a good look at everyone who was on a stretcher... When she got close enough, I saw it was Vilani... The expression on her face said that she was shattered, and that she was very insecure... She was on the brink of bursting out in tears... She looked at me for a short moment, then towards Blain... She closed her eyes for a short moment, and I noticed tears were rolling down her cheeks... Then she walked off... I felt sorry for her for some reason... I didn't know what happened to her, but it looked as if she needed someone to talk to... I told Blain I'd be back very soon, and I followed her.*

*I found her sitting alone with her hands in her hair looking down while she gently rubbed her belly every now and then... So... I sat next to her... She looked up to me, and I saw her eyes were all soggy and red...*

Nicole: Hi...

Vilani: \*coughs\* Hey.....

Nicole: What's wrong.....?

Vilani: \*wipes face\*

Nicole: Hmm...?

Vilani: Jarod hasn't come back..... It's been hours ever since... Something happened to him, I just know..... He and Shifty didn't came back.....

Nicole: \*sighs\*

Vilani: I can't take it to wander around in the dark like this..... I'm scared.....

Nicole: I-I know... I know.....

Vilani: What if something awful happened to him...?

Nicole: Don't say that..... I'm sure he's fine..... Maybe he took shelter with Shifty somewhere..... It's been raining an awful lot today.....

Vilani: Yeah... Yeah, you're right... He just... He just took shelter somewhere... That's all.....

Nicole: Everything is gonna be ok.....

Vilani: \*nods\* Of course...

Nicole: It's getting late... You need to get some rest...

Vilani: I can't sleep... I tried... I just can't... Not until I know for sure that Jarod's alright...

Nicole: You don't have to sleep... Just close you're eyes...

Vilani: I've been awake for more then 18 hours now... And... I'm so tired... But I just can't sleep...

Nicole: It's ok...

Vilani: \*smiles weakly\*

Nicole: How're you feeling...?

Vilani: Tired... Cold...

Nicole: Can I get you anything...?

Vilani: Naah... I'm fine... Thanks...

Nicole: Can I...?

Vilani: ... Hm...?

Nicole: Can I feel it...?

Vilani: Yeah, sure...

*She lifts up her shirt to expose her belly. I gently placed my hands on her stomach... And I felt that something was moving... She moved her hands next to mine, gently scratching her belly...*

Nicole: Feels wonderful, doesn't it...?

Vilani: Yeah... \*smiles weakly\*

Nicole: Do you know if it's gonna be a boy or a girl...?

Vilani: We don't know yet... They don't have the right equipment for an echo-scan...

Nicole: Got any names...? \*smiles\*

Vilani: Well... If it's a girl... I'm gonna call her Sala... Just like my mother...

Nicole: And if it's a boy...?

Vilani: Then his name will be Fabian... After Jarod's father... \*smiles\*

Nicole: Beautiful names...

Vilani: Yeah...

*Vilani and I talked for hours... About pretty much everything... About her baby... About mine... But we also talked about the things that bothered us... Like the war... A few hours later, she could barely hold her eyes open... I waited 'till she fell asleep... And I walked away... Before I went out the door, I turned around and took a final look at Vilani... She was still asleep... With her hand on her belly... For some reason, I noticed I had a little smile on my face... With that, I walked out of the door... And that was the last time I saw Vilani...*

*Blain wasn't awake when I came back... But I wanted to stay with him... I wanted that I was the first person he sees when he opened his eyes again... IF he ever opens them again... Rico said that he took quite a beating... His right eye was cut open, and I saw he had several wounds on his body... He had a blood stained bandage on his stomach... And it pains me to see him like this... I gently took his hand in mine... And I felt his fingers moving... I whispered in his ear that I loved him very much... And after sitting like that for a half an hour, I fell asleep once again...*

*I woke up when I felt that someone was caressing my hair... When I opened my eyes, I noticed that Blain was looking at me, while he strokes his right hand through my hair... When I saw he was looking at me, I cuddled him for a long time... I heard him grunt in pain, so I held him less tight...*

Nicole: \*shakes head\* You're so stupid, Blain... I told you..... I told you not to do it.....

Blain: \*sighs\* I-I know.....

Nicole: You okay.....?

Blain: No..... I can't feel my left arm... I-I can't move it.....

Rico: Hey, welcome back, sarge..... How you feeling.....?

Blain: shootty.....

Nicole: Rico... Is there a... Reason why Blain doesn't feel his left arm.....?

Rico: Eh...



*He hesitated for a short moment... Then Rico sighed and sat down on a stretcher...*

Rico: The reason why you don't feel you're arm... Is because we deactivated it...

Blain: ... What.....? Why.....?

Rico: Well... Two reasons... A cybernetic engineer took a look at you... You're arm is damaged beyond repair... And... You're body will reject you're arm when it no longer functions... But... Amputating wasn't an option... If we did, you would've died by now... So... The best way to ensure you're survival was to deactivate it... And you need a new arm once we get the resources... Until then, you're arm will no longer function...

Blain: I see... And... What's the other reason...?

Rico: Hm?

Blain: Th-The other reason.....?

Rico: \*sighs\*

Blain: Tell me, Rico... Please.....

Rico: I eh... Well... The cybernetic engineer couldn't do much... He eh... Th-The chaos-drive inside of you is powering you're arm... But... It's also you're life-support... A-And the chaos-drive is damaged... It's draining... That's another reason of why we deactivated you're arm... You're arm will only drain it further down... So... So we deactivated you're arm to keep you alive for as long as possible...

Blain: ... So..... What you're saying is... I-is that I-I'm dieing...?

Rico: \*nods slowly\*

Nicole: \*gasps\*

Blain: ... I see... ..Ho-How much time...?

Rico: Six months... Maybe eight... Nine months tops... So... Seeing you're current state... It's... It's not recommended to go out on the field... No more field duty for you, sir...

Blain: \*nods slowly\*

Rico: I'm sorry to say this under these conditions..... I-I wish there w-was another way, b-but-

Blain: It's ok, Rico..... Thanks.....

Rico: I'm sorry... I truly am.....

*And with that, Rico left again...*

Blain: ... Well stick me in a dress and call me Sally..... I'm... I-I don't know what to say... I didn't come all this way just to die by something as stupid as THIS?!!

*All of a sudden, he bashed the little table to the right of him with his right fist... The wood cracked and the table broke in pieces, and everything that was on it fell on the ground... The way looked at me was scary... I couldn't believe he was dieing all over again, that I was gonna loose him... But... There was still hope...*

Nicole: Y-You heard what Rico s-said right...? You s-still got six months... I-I'm sure they'll f-find a-a-a chaos-drive and...-

Blain: Nikki...

*He held my hand... And looked at me... But... It was scary to see... It scared me... It was the way he looked at me...*

Blain: A chaos-drive... Would supply power for a very long time... Seventy years at least..... Even if they do find a chaos-drive... I would outlive you... I would... Outlive my friends..... I'll see everyone I ever care for die... I'll see this generation die.....And probably the next..... And then... I'll die..... And..... I don't want that to happen again..... I've seen too many people I cared for dieing..... Please..... I've had enough..... No more..... I deserve my peace after all these years..... But... N-Not like this..... N-Not like this, Nikki... I-I don't wanna go like this.....

Nicole: B-Bu-but... Y-You have a choice...

Blain: \*shakes head\* I won't go through this again.....

Nicole: ... But... W-What am I gonna do when you're not here anymore.....?

Blain: Hey.....

*He gently nudged my head up and made me stare in his face... Those eyes..... For some reason... I didn't realize it yet... I was scared but... I don't know.....*

Blain: You're gonna do what you always did..... You're gonna be strong... And live through this... Hopefully... The war will end soon and... Then I can die in peace... Next to you..... That's all I ever wanted...

*He wiped a tear out of my face... I wish I could have changed his mind..... But then again... Would that be selfish of me...? I didn't know..... I took his hand and held the back of his hand against my cheek..... I kissed his hand not long after that and I gave him a tight cuddle... I tried not to cry... For his sake... But it was so difficult to oppress it... While I was cuddling him, I heard he started to chuckle.....*

Blain: Hehehehehe... \*chuckles\*

Nicole: ... What...?

Blain: It's..... It's actually kinda funny.....

Nicole: What are you talking about.....?

Blain: When I was still with the RRTS.... I... I fought the Imperial Droid Army without... Without getting shot once... I... I fought rebels and got mortally wounded... But I survived..... I ran on the beaches of Angel Island when all the odds were against us... But... But I survived right...? I... I didn't get shot once back there... And.... And I saw the end of that war... I... I saw the beginning of this one... And maybe... Maybe I'll see the end of it... B-But the funny thing is... I survived all those things just to die by something as simple as this... \*chuckles\*

*The chuckles lasted for a short moment... It slowly changed into sobbing... I already felt tears rolling down my face, but I didn't... I didn't want him to see me crying... I had to be strong for him... But it was so difficult... I held him even tighter as I felt he was clenching his right arm around my back...*

Blain: \*sobs\* Oh frack..... I-I'm dieing.....! I'm dieing, Nic.....!! I don't wanna.....!! I-I can't be dieing.....!! There are so m-many things left unsaid.....!! I'm so sorry.....!! I'm so sorry, Nikki.....!! I don't wanna.....!! I don't wanna.....!! I don't wanna.....!! I wanna stay with you...!! It's not fair, damn it...!! It's not fracking fair...!!

*There was nothing I could do to comfort him..... And sadly, there wasn't anything to comfort me..... The longer I held him, the louder he was sobbing... I felt how my shoulder got soaked with bitter tears... And I noticed how my tears slowly turned into bitter ones themselves... I caressed the back of his head..... And whispered in his ear that I loved him a lot... As long as he knows that...*

Nicole: Ssssh.....

Blain: I don't wanna.....

*We cuddled like that for a very long time..... I realized the harsh inevitable truth the moment he started sobbing... And that was a difficult thing for me... It's been a long time since I've seen Blain crying like this... He cried like this when Kaelyn died... But apart from that... I've never seen him crying like this... And it was a rare thing to see him cry... But whenever he was... It pierced my heart to hear him sob... I never left his side that evening... I stayed with him until he fell asleep from exhaustion many hours later... I gently placed his head on his pillow and watched him for a moment... The tears were rolling down my face as I silenced my sorrow for his sake... He shouldn't see me crying... I had to be strong for him... But now that he's asleep, I'm not required to be... I held his hand and I couldn't hold myself anymore...*

## 37 - Sugar, we're going down...

I only slept for a few hours. For some reason, I just couldn't sleep. I stared for hours at the ceiling above me, wondering about so many things. Whenever I looked at Nicole, it was painful to realize I wouldn't be with her next year. For better or worse. And I could see she was exhausted by everything she's ever been through. And so am I. I can't go on anymore...

I got out of my stretcher and tried to make sure I didn't wake Nicole up. I just needed to be alone so I walked through the compound to clear my mind. No one was still awake at this time of the hour, except for a few soldiers who I didn't know. Some humans were walking by as well and I found a nice and quiet spot where I could sit down.

I often wondered if the things I did would ever be acknowledged. But that night, the thought had my special attention for some reason. Wondering if someone would ever commemorate me as a hero for ending the first war... If it wasn't for the RRTS back then, we'd still be fighting the Imperial Droid Armies of Robotnik and the Red Faction. It also makes me wonder if anyone really knew Tyrone, Cyrus and Jasco... I still think of them every day... But with year that passes, there seems to be a memory missing... I can't remember what Tyrone sounded like... I can't remember Cyrus's stupid sense of humor... I can't remember Jasco's friendship... Truth is... They died while fighting for their own and for everyone else's freedom, but they never received a ribbon or a medal for their actions after they died... They just died and no one seems to remember them for what they did. Just another anonymous casualty forgotten as time passed by... Would that happen to me as well if I'm gone...? Would I be forgotten...? Will I even be buried with a little dignity...? I'm the only one left now who could tell the story of the RRTS and their actions to free the planet of the metal warmachines that once threatened the entire world... But what if there's no one left to tell their stories...? Our story...? My story...? I don't need a medal to remind me for what I did... I don't need to be praised as a hero... It's because I know what I did. All I want is someone to know what we did in the past... What I will do in the future... And the only way to do that is to tell our story... It's something that should never be forgotten... Not just our story, but also the millions of other people like us... But I realized all too well that it's like chasing wind... You never seem to get it, even though you know it's there somewhere.

At some point, I heard footsteps through the hallway. I looked up and I saw this young little hedgehog girl walking while she was carrying a pink backpack with hearts on it and everything. She stops for a short moment to look for something, then her expression turned into a disappointed one. She turns around, and while she did, she noticed me...

Girl: Hi...

Blain: Hey...

Girl: You're alone too...?

Blain: Sort of... Are you...?

Girl: \*nods slowly\*

Blain: ... Where's your mother...?

Girl: ... I don't know.....

Blain: Than... Where's your dad...?

Girl: \*shrugs\* I don't know.....

Blain: \*sighs\*

Girl: ... Do you wanna play a game.....? \*smiles\*

Blain: A-A game...? Shouldn't you be in bed? It's very late...

Girl: \*shrugs\* I'm not tired... And besides, no one told me to go to bed...

Blain: Look eh... I have to go... Just... Go back, okay...? They'll take care of you...

**Than I got up to walk away, but when I made the first step...**

Girl: ... That's what everyone tells me...

Blain: What...? Whadda ya mean...?

Girl: To go back... But... I always end up being alone...

Blain: I eh...

Girl: ... Please...?

**I looked at her for a short moment. It doesn't take you long to realize she really is lonely. Her face said everything... And I felt sorry for her...**

Blain: What do you have in mind...? \*smiles\*

Girl: You know how to play checkers...?

Blain: Hmm... I'm afraid not... What else you got...?

Girl: ... Chess?

Blain: Well yeah, sure... I know how to play chess... Not saying I'm good at it though...

Girl: \*smiles\*

**She let her backpack slide off of her back and opened it. She opened a box and got out a cardboard chessboard and plastic chess pieces. She sets up the board and we started playing...**

**She said something every now and then, and I just went along with it. She told me that she had a lot of friends back home, and once she gets back, they'll be playing hide and seek in the forests like they always did. She loves to draw with her brother, and told me she got this chessboard for her birthday from her brother... After a while, it stayed silent for a short moment while it was my move... Then I noticed she looked at me...**

Girl: You're a soldier, right...?

Blain: Yeah, I am... Or... At least I was...

Girl: Was it worth it...?

Blain: What was worth it...?

Girl: To be a soldier...?

Blain: Hm...

Girl: ... Was it...?

Blain: Well... In all these years that I've been a soldier, I've been pretty much all over the world... And I saw a lot of how other people lived... They didn't have education, jobs, food, and water or just about anything... Shooting was part of every day life... And I helped others by getting rid of their oppressors and to rebuild it despite all the dangers I faced and to protect my friends... If I wasn't fighting for myself to be

free, then who would...? I sacrificed a lot... But I also gained a lot... It gave me peace for 23 years with the woman I love... So... Was it worth it...? I guess so...

Girl: Yeah but... What about now...? You said you're not a soldier anymore...

Blain: Yeah... But... You gotta see it this way... Wars are like... A massive game of chess... You and I fight over important squares, and for the ones we don't occupy with our own pieces... It's not enough just to guard your own king while you're enemies are advancing in on you, trying to capture your queen... I fight to stop them, and hopefully one day, you or your children don't have to face the threat of another war...

Girl: ...

Blain: I learned a lot from the first war that I was in... Only the future will show us if we were successful to end this war... But... Hopefully, in the end, we'll be the ones saying "checkmate"...

Girl: ... Dang! \*smiles\*

Blain: Hehehe...

**We talked for about another hour... She told me a lot about her friends, what she likes to do, and everything. And I just listened. I felt as if she needs someone that listens to her. It's gruesome to hear what she's been through before she got here, but she doesn't really seem to mind. She doesn't know any better... At some point, she packed her chessboard back in her backpack and was about to leave...**

Girl: What's your name...?

Blain: I-I'm Blain...

Girl: \*smiles\*

**Then she turned around to walk away...**

Blain: Wait, what's your name...?!

Girl: I'm Kaelyn...!

**... Kaelyn...?**

Kaelyn: \*smiles\*

**And with that, she walked away in the poorly illuminated corridor... I was so baffled for some reason... I stared into blank space for a moment until I felt someone touched my shoulder as I saw Kaelyn walking away...**

Nicole: Blain...?

Blain: Hm?

Nicole: You alright...?

Blain: Yeah, yeah... I-I'm fine...

Nicole: You sure...?

Blain: \*nods\*

Nicole: ... Who was that girl you were talking to...?

Blain: Just... S-Someone who needed company...

**Nicole and I sat together for a short moment and talked... At some point, I told that if she was tired, she should go on ahead... I wanted to stay for a while... On the way back I encountered Vilani. She looks exhausted... A total wreck... I didn't know what was going on, but when I started to talk to Vilani, I found out that Shifty and Jarod were missing for two days now. After the fighting in Azerbaijan, they haven't been seen since. Truth be told, I haven't thought about them... I wasn't thinking about my own guys... Nicole and I were so caught up by our own problems that we didn't even saw the misery of others. I had the feeling that the unity we once had here was slowly crumbling down... The moral was down and seemed to get lower by the day... Supplies were low and we were in desperate need for ammo, food and water... Vilani said that it wasn't worth it... She was the first one to realize... And then slowly, I too realized it... I opened my eyes... And realized that it was a matter of waiting...**

**For the first time in many months, I had the feeling we were delusional... That we were all imagining an enormous victory of the GUN against all odds... But that wasn't possible... The GUN has hundreds of thousands of mobile infantry, Rapid Deployment Troops, weapons, gunships, tanks, mobile artillery, APC's and a lot more... Not the mention the advanced technology they have... All we have are a couple of thousand soldiers and a delusional vision... How could we be so deceived by our own imagination...? Was it desperation that led us to believe that...? A spark of hope...? The longer I thought about it, the more I started to believe that...**

**Like many nights, I couldn't sleep in peace. This night was no exception... That idea kept on circling in my head and it never seemed to go away... Nicole had her head on my chest and an arm around my stomach while we were cuddling like that...**

Nicole: ... You still awake.....?

Blain: Yeah.....

Nicole: What's wrong.....?

Blain: ... Nothing.....

Nicole: \*Kisses Blain's chest\*

Blain: I think I finally accepted it...

Nicole: Accepted what.....?

Blain: ... Everything..... Because... The only thing I can do is to accept the things the way they are... Nothing more, nothing less...

Nicole: \*sighs\*

Blain: And... I thought about you said...

Nicole: What...?

Blain: When the war is over... I'll do everything to stay with you..... If they offer me a new arm, I'll take it... I'll need a chaos drive that lasts for at least thirty more years... I'll take any alternative there is to keep me alive... I don't wanna go like this...

Nicole: ... You really mean that.....?

Blain: \*nods\* Yeah... I didn't come all this and survived everything just to die by something like this... I won't give up...

Nicole: \*smiles weakly\*

Blain: Hehe...

Nicole: You're not the only one having good memories to that arm...

Blain: Whadda ya mean.....?

Nicole: ... \*smiles and blushes\*

Blain: Oooooooh... Hehehe... Yeah I get it...

Nicole: Hehe...

Blain: \*smiles\*

Nicole: ... Do you remember that time under the stars in the grass at night...? A long time ago...?

Blain: Of course I do... The second time we were on top of an ant hill... Hehehe...

Nicole: Yeah..... We had nasty stings and itches for weeks...

Blain: \*smiles\*

Nicole: I wish we were young again... And to experience everything again with what we know now...

Blain: \*nods\* I really miss those days... Each and every day with no worries... Do whatever we like without being bound to something... And look at us now...

Nicole: Heh...

Blain: ... You think everything will be back like how it used to be once the war is over.....?

Nicole: I don't know, Blain... I really don't... But... I know that one day; everything will be back like how it used to be...

Blain: How'd you know...?

Nicole: I just know, Blain..... I just know.....

**We cuddled for a long time without saying anything... At some point, she turned over as I placed my head on her head and held on to her... And I felt how her heart was beating... Slowly... The sounds of her heart beating made me relax... All she'll hear when she places her head on my chest is total silence...**

**I don't know how to express my feelings towards her. So I decided not to. But she knows... It's something I rarely talk about and I don't know how to deal with it... But that night, I felt something special... I didn't know what it was... I never felt it before... It's some sort of excitement... But intense... The other feelings I ever felt with her was nothing compared to this particular feeling I felt that night... The feeling was sparked the moment she looked me in the eyes and held me by my waist. Her beautiful smile slowly turned into a serious expression... I knew what was coming... Normally, it's not something I would talk about it with someone else besides Nicole... It's not because I was ashamed of it, nor was it because I thought it was a wrong thing to talk about. No... It's because I don't know what to say about it...**

**She always held her head close to mine whenever it happened... She firmly held on to me, as I feel her warm breath in my neck... Most of the times, she looked you in the eyes whenever she wasn't closing them, and whispered in my ear... Nicole always told me that love does not revolve around the things we sometimes did... So... Why'd we do it if love isn't revolving around it...?**



**She always smiled and blushed whenever I asked her that... But she always came up with the same answer... It brings us closer together and will only make the love grow... I never quite understood what she meant with that... Over the years, I wasn't thinking about my feelings for her... It was just there without ever leaving me... But that night, I finally understood what she meant with it... No words can describe it... I could feel it... Smell it... Hear it... Touch it... It was all there... And like she told me many years ago... I had to give in to those feelings... Which I did... So it was no exception I gave in to those feeling that night...**

**When I woke up the next morning, I heard a lot yelling. Every now and then, I heard loud thuds as if stuff fell over. As soon as I checked to see what was happening, I saw a few guys I didn't know were surrounding a human... A panther, a lion, a lioness, a Rottweiler, a mustang and a cougar... And Tavish was there as well...**

Mustang: Whoa, easy there, buddy!

Human: Spiraht mjilnoradachi de mi genude!!

**As soon the cougar slowly closed in on the human, the human punched the cougar on the nose real hard...**

Cougar: Ow!! What the!! frack!!

Panther: Hey!! Cool it!! We don't wanna hurt you!!

Rottweiler: The hell is he saying?!

Lion: How the frack should I now?!!

Human: Noia!! Noia pasitiayo!! El furka sabahr!! El furka sabahr!!!

Mustang: Does anyone speak whatever the hell he's speaking?!!

Human: Hyminat genude musala hochsonit ha deh!!

Lioness: Watch it!!

**They all jumped on the human and cuffed him... The human kept on yelling and crying and tried to get free but he couldn't...**

Blain: What's up with the human soldier...?

Tavish: These guys found him wondering in the outskirts of the city all by himself. I don't know what he was doing, but he was probably trying to get back to his own kind.

Blain: I see...

Tavish: Everything is just so chaotic at the moment, sarge...

**It stayed silent for a short moment as we watched the human...**

Blain: Tavish...?

Tavish: Yes sarge...?

Blain: Any word from Jarod and Shifty...?

Tavish: \*nods slowly\*

Blain: ... Well...?

Tavish: These guys found Jarod... Their from the 409<sup>th</sup> Mobile artillery... The six of them are the only

ones left... And I saw that they carried Jarod and that human in... I think the lieutenant knows more... Lieutenant Mallow?

### **The Rottweiler looked up and walked towards Tavish...**

Tavish: Lieutenant Mallow, this sergeant Blain of the 506<sup>th</sup>.

Mallow: Nice to meet you sir.

Blain: Likewise... I understand you found one of my guys...?

Mallow: Yeah, a big cat. We were on our way to Azerbaijan after hearing the secured broadcasts frequencies... On the way, we saw him on the outskirts of the city crawling in the mud towards the city... He got shot, and looked like a total mess... He kept on saying he had to go back to get someone... I can't remember what the name was, eh...

Blain: ... Shifty...?

Mallow: Yeah, that's the one.

Blain: Did you found him as well...?

Mallow: No sir... He was the only one we found besides the human.

Blain: \*nods slowly\*

Tavish: Jarod is being taken care of in the sickbay... Vilani's with him...

Blain: I see... Thanks...

Mallow: Don't mention it.

Blain: So... Mobile artillery huh?

Mallow: Yeah. The big guy over there is Di-Angelo. The lioness is Saidah, Di-Angelo's girl. The mustang is Eleanor. The big cougar who got punched is Fabian. And that black panther over there is Gino.

All: \*nods\*

Blain: What are we gonna do with him? \*nods over to the human\*

Mallow: I don't know. He's a POW now... He surrendered, he's scared.

Blain: Yeah, I can see that...

### **All of a sudden, I felt a hand on my shoulder. As I turned around, I saw Scyth...**

Scyth: Sarge... I have to talk to you...

Blain: \*nods\* Excuse me, Mallow.

Mallow: Yes, sir.

**Scyth had a very serious face when we walked... Way more serious then normal... He had an arm around my shoulder and kept pushing me where we could be alone... There was something definitely wrong... On the way, he didn't say anything... Once we reached a place where we were alone, he looked around, and when he was sure we were truly alone, he looked at me...**

Scyth: Blain... Something big has happened...

Blain: What...?

Scyth: Cooper is dead...

Blain: ... Who...?

Scyth: The guy who runs COMScann on his own...

Blain: ... What...?!

Scyth: \*nods\*

Blain: ... How'd he died...? Heart attack or something...?

Scyth: \*shakes head\*

Blain: He's murdered...?

Scyth: His throat was slit and he misses his right hand and eye... He was killed...

Blain: ... Whoa..... Why the hell was he murdered...?

Scyth: He runs COMScann on his own... He kept track of enemy activities around our perimeters in a radius of a hundred kilometres... He was the guy who launched the UAV for you to indentify enemy positions... He gave coordinates for artillery strikes...

Blain: ... Damn...

Scyth: He was only one who knew how the whole tactical operations centre worked... With him being dead, we're not able to prepare counter measures when the time is near...

Blain: ...

Scyth: You don't realize the seriousness of it, do you...?

Blain: What are you talking about...?

Scyth: Cooper was murdered because someone doesn't want us to get out alive... Someone is trying to rat everyone out...

## 38 - Bloody tears...

Blain: ... You're saying we have a snitch here somewhere...? [br]

Scyth: \*nods\* Without a doubt...[br]

Blain: But... Why...? [br]

Scyth: I don't know... But Cooper was murdered for a reason... The GUN is closing in on us and we can not form a counter assault without the tactical operations centre... Someone doesn't want us to get out alive...[br]

[br]

Blain: \*sighs\* [br]

Scyth: So... What's the plan...? [br]

Blain: I don't know... We can evacuate everyone to the bunker below while we take on the fight...[br]

[br]

Scyth: Bunker...? [br]

Blain: Yeah... It's a nuke shelter... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Alright... [br]

Blain: Inform everyone of Cooper's death... Make sure only the ones relevant will know about it. We don't wanna cause unnecessary panic... [br]

[br]

Scyth: \*nods\* [br]

Blain: Where's his body? [br]

Scyth: Still at COMScann... Rico is at the scene...[br]

Blain: Wait... His right hand and eye were missing right...? [br]

Scyth: \*nods\* [br]

Blain: ... Why? [br]

Scyth: COMScann has a fingerprint analyzer and iris scan to identify authorizations. I think whoever killed him granted himself access to COMScann to frack everything up for us... [br]

[br]

Blain: Right... I'm gonna take a look... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Will do... Keep you're eyes open and watch you're back, Blain...[br]

Blain: You too... [br]

[br]

**And with that, I walked away... [br]**

**[br]**

**When I arrived, I saw a few guys standing there. I saw Rico bending over the corpse. As soon as I called his name, Rico looked up and I went to him. [br]**

**[br]**

Rico: Nasty way to go, huh sarge? [br]

Blain: Yeah... What do you know...? [br]

Rico: Well his throat is slit, his right hand is missing and his right eye got poked out. The blood hasn't thickened yet, so he's dead for probably around 6 to 8 hours. But I think that wasn't the cause of his death... [br]

[br]

Blain: You know what killed him...? [br]

Rico: Take a look... [br]

[br]

**Rico rolled up the sleeve and pointed to a very small dot on the arm where a little bit of blood was flowing out. It looked as if he was injected with something... [br]**

[br]

Blain: An injection...? [br]

Rico: Yeah... Though I have no idea what was used on him... The killer probably has access to the sickbay... But... That's all based on a speculation... I'm a medic, not a forensic analyzer... I'm doing all I can...[br]

[br]

Blain: Yeah I know... [br]

Rico: How many people know about this...? [br]

Blain: Something like this won't stay a secret for long... [br]

Rico: \*nods\* [br]

Blain: Is there something I can do...? [br]

Rico: \*sighs and shakes no\* No sir... All we can do now is to watch our backs from now on... And try to find him before it's too late...[br]

[br]

**For the rest of the day, I was worried... Not scared, just worried... I started to pay attention to people if they behaved differently... I looked for things that seemed out of the ordinary... Nothing... I was starting to get paranoid... Every time when I was alone in a corridor, I constantly turned my head to see if I was being followed. Nothing... Come on, Blain, get a grip... The answer should be easy, right...? Check out the new guys first... See if anyone looks suspicious or acts differently... Look for something that stands out... Nothing... There has to be something... Who wanted us dead the most...? Was it possible that someone from the GUN was with us...? We do have a few dozens of humans... Most of them were old people and kids... Except for Jones... But Jones is with the ICA, and is wanted by the GUN, and they want him dead... So it can't be Jones... So no human could have done this... Someone on our side...? A furrie...? If so, why? He or she wouldn't gain anything by delivering us to the GUN... Come on, damn it... Think... Think for fracks sake... But no matter how hard I tried, I never came with an answer... It just didn't make any sense... [br]**

[br]

**It was late in evening when I went to see how Jarod was doing. Once I got in the sickbay, I didn't see him. I only saw Vilani sitting near some guy... Holy shoot, is that really Jarod...? I didn't recognize him at first... He looked bad... His uniform was covered with dust, mud and blood stains. His jacket and trousers were ripped... I only recognized him because Vilani was with him... Jarod wasn't awake... Vilani wasn't awake either... I sat there for a moment looking at them until Vilani slowly opened her eyes... I could see her eyes were red and soggy... [br]**

[br]

Blain: Hey Vilani..... [br]

Vilani: O-Oh hey sergeant.... \*wipes her face\* [br]

Blain: How you doing...? [br]

Vilani: \*shakes her head\* [br]

Blain: Hm...? [br]

Vilani: I-I don't know... I really don't... I-I'm... I'm worried about Jarod... [br]

Blain: How's he doing.....? [br]

Vilani: He eh... A-A few guys found him... O-On the outskirts of Azerbaijan... And... He was shot... He got hit in the pelvis... [br]

[br]

Blain: Oh... [br]

Vilani: They said that... He was crawling towards the city... To get Shifty... B-But... [br]

Blain: Where's Shifty now...? [br]

Vilani: Jarod told me that... That Shifty was wounded... A-And... Jarod had to put him out of his misery..... He didn't want to... He wanted to take him back... B-But... If Jarod did that... He wouldn't be here right now... Jarod..... He was crying his eyes out... They couldn't calm him down... He kept on crying and struggled to get free and wanted to get Shifty back but... They sedated him... And he finally calmed down... I stayed with him ever since I found out he got back... And he told me everything until he fell asleep from exhaustion... He hasn't woke up since... [br]

[br]

Blain: \*nods slowly\* [br]

Vilani: And it scares me to see him like this... I can see his eyes twitching... He talks in his sleep... His hands twitches... Sometimes... He wakes up, sits upright and yells for Shifty... Then he falls back to sleep... It's painful to see him like this... And... When he told me that Shifty died, it came as a shock to me... I've always liked Shifty... But he was Jarod's lifelong friend... And he had to kill his lifelong friend... It places a burden him... But... Also on me... And... I don't know how to deal with it... [br]

[br]

Blain: You can't deal with it on your own... You need to stick together like you always did... That's what Nicole and I still do... Things aren't easy, I know... Especially with your kid coming... There isn't much I can do... And I realize that... But if you ever feel the need to talk... You know where I am... Nicole talks a lot with you too... So if you want to talk to her as well, she'll be here for the both of you... I know she will... [br]

[br]

[br]

Vilani: \*nods slowly\* [br]

Blain: Alright... Try to get some rest, ok...? [br]

Vilani: I will... [br]

[br]

**I squeezed Jarod's hand before I left... Then I looked back at Vilani... It didn't take you long to realize that she really had a hard time with everything happening around her... She's still young... And it broke my heart to see her like that... I never use that phrase, because technically, I don't have a heart... But that's the only way I can describe what I saw that evening in the sickbay... Before I left, I gently scratched Vilani under her chin and then I got out of the sickbay... [br]**

[br]

**Shifty's dead... I couldn't believe it at first... I've known him for so many years and to realize he's won't be with us anymore was something that was difficult to accept. Jarod and Shifty were lifelong friends who shared everything that they've ever been through. And to hear that Jarod shot Shifty to put him out of misery... I couldn't do it if someone asked me to... But Jarod did... But now look where it got him... After hearing what Vilani said, I knew that Jarod was mentally instable after putting Shifty out of his misery... Like she said, it placed a burden on Jarod, but also on Vilani to see Jarod like this...[br]**

[br]

**When I was on my back to my room, I noticed lieutenant Mallow and his squad were still at the same spot where I last saw them, and were still accompanied by that prisoner. Tavish was there as well with Rico... [br]**

**[br]**

Tavish/Rico: Sergeant... [br]

Blain: Evening guys... Still don't know what to do with that prisoner, lieutenant Mallow...? [br]

Mallow: No sir. We wanted to lock him away somewhere, but for some reason, they didn't let us... So I guess we're stuck with him. All day long, he's been blabbering to us... [br]

[br]

Human: El furka sabahr... [br]

Mallow: Yeah, yeah, yeah, we know that by now. El furka zabaar. Same to you, buddy. [br]

Rico: ... \*laughs\* [br]

Mallow: What? [br]

Rico: He just called you a son of a dog, sir. \*laughs\* [br]

[br]

Mallow: ... Well I call him an asshole. [br]

Human: Ash holl... [br]

Blain: Now he calls YOU an asshole... Hehehe...[br]

Mallow: Pffft... [br]

Tavish: How'd you know that anyway? [br]

Rico: What? [br]

Tavish: With what he just said? [br]

Rico: Oh. I studied foreign languages at university. [br]

Mallow: What language is that? [br]

Rico: Atealian. It's only spoken by humans at Cantaloniun Islands. [br]

Mallow: ... Maybe you can translate something for me. [br]

Rico: What is it, sir? [br]

Mallow: We found these documents he was carrying. Maybe you can translate that for us. [br]

Rico: Let me take a look. [br]

[br]

**Mallow handed him the documents and Rico took a look at it. It stayed silent for a long time as he was trying to figure out what it says... [br]**

**[br]**

Rico: Looks like he's a refugee. It says here that he was a soldier. A civil war broke out, he refused his duty and he fled the islands with his sister, wife and kids. Sister died when hostile civil forces patrolled the checkpoints near the harbour and found out he didn't had the right papers and was member of the opposite forces. They tried to get away, but they opened fire on them which resulted in the death of his sister. Wife and kids barely escaped. He made contact with the underground to get to his embassy so that he, his wife and kids could safely get to the other side. [br]

[br]

Mallow: I see. [br]

Rico: "Ahmed"...? Que muawhira masdem ya musdemdja nazee...?[br]

[br]

**At that point, the human looked up baffled to Rico and looked at him for a short moment... [br]**

**[br]**

Rico: Muawhira mashdem ya musdemdja nazee shukaran...? Howahl...? [br]

Human: \*shakes head slowly\* [br]

Rico: ... Tariq yen spass...? [br]

Human: ... Yallah... Inhs baraq yallah... [br]

Rico: ... [br]

[br]

Mallow: What'd you asked...? [br]

Rico: I asked him what happened to his wife and kids... [br]

Mallow: ... What happened...? [br]

Rico: Their all dead... [br]

Human: \*sighs\* [br]

[br]

**I never liked humans. I always hated them. But this one... I saw him sitting like that... With a desolate look in his eyes... Nicole once said that not all humans are bad... Just as much that not all furries are good. I just had a hard time with trusting humans... But after hearing what Rico said that happened to him... I don't know. It was as if a switch was turned on which changed my opinion on this particular human... Even though the human and we were worlds apart, we could relate to him in some way. It made me think that we're not that different as a living being, if we put our personal feelings and clashes aside. I think that everyone noticed that as we stared at him while he was looking down... At some point, we saw a tear going down his face... [br]**

**[br]**

Blain: ... Come on... Get those cuffs off of him... Let him go... [br]

Rico: Brash kentjure de el bash matti... [br]

Human: ... Saraghti bah anahr da jusudi... Vericere alderashma... Lachomwuahira eshder barach tsu mi da hirachya... \*smiles weakly\*[br]

[br]

Rico: Hehehe... [br]

Mallow: What'd you say? [br]

Rico: I told him we were gonna get his cuffs off and that he could go... [br]

Mallow: And what'd he say? [br]

Rico: Well, he said that he was happy to finally hear someone speaks his language and that I pretty much suck at it when it comes to pronunciation. But he's thankful. [br]

[br]

**Then all of a sudden, we heard a loud pistol shot, and we saw the human fell down... There was a hole in his head, and when we turned around, we saw Scyth standing there, holding a pistol with a smoking barrel...[br]**

**[br]**

Tavish: What the frack?! The hell did you do?![br]

Scyth: ... You heard what happened today?[br]

Tavish: Well, yeah, I know what happen-[br]

Scyth: You don't realize how serious the situation is right now, do you? [br]

Tavish: ... [br]

Scyth: .... We don't take human prisoners. [br]

[br]

**Scyth stood there for a short moment while he was looking at everyone... Then he turned around and walked away... [br]**

**[br]**

Mallow: \*sighs\* [br]

Eleanor: What the frack... That guy has issues... [br]



Rico: ... Scyth has always been some sort of a mystery... No one seems to know who he is or where he comes from... [br]

[br]

**I know all to well who Scyth is...[br]**

[br]

Tavish: Well I heard a story about Scyth... [br]

Rico: You did? [br]

Tavish: Yeah. This one time, we had P.O.W's. He watched them and waited until everyone left... He handed out cigarettes to the prisoners, hell, even gave them a light. Then something just snapped inside of him... He took his aim with his rifle and shot every prisoner... [br]

[br]

Gino: What? [br]

Tavish: Yeah! About 20 of 'em. [br]

Rico: Well I heard it was more then 40. [br]

Scyth: Tavish! [br]

[br]

**We didn't noticed that Scyth was standing behind us again...[br]**

[br]

Scyth: It's Tavish right...? [br]

Tavish: Y-Yeah... [br]

Scyth: \*nods\*... [br]

[br]

**I saw that Scyth had his hand near his pistol holster... After standing like that while he looked at everyone for a short moment again, he turned around and walked away again. The others sighed in relief after he turned around, but then he turned around once more... [br]**

[br]

Scyth: Anyone a smoke...? [br]

Rico/Tavish: No thanks!![br]

Scyth: ... How about you? [br]

Gino: \*shakes fiercely no while looking scared\* [br]

Scyth: \*nods\* Thought so. [br]

[br]

**Then he walked away... This time, they waited until they knew he was gone for sure... [br]**

[br]

Fabian: The dude is seriously fracked up... [br]

[br]

**That night, everything was tense... I felt nervous... I was being paranoid... For some reason or another... I couldn't shake the feeling off that something big was about to happen... Something that would seal our fates forever... And that there was no return... I felt as if we could have prevented it, yet nothing happened yet... Or at least, I thought so... What scared me the most is because I didn't know what was happening... And yet I knew something was happening... And all this time I kept on thinking... What could possibly happen...? Thousands of scenario's could happen... All I could do was to pray that none was realized... [br]**

[br]

**At around 2:56 am, someone banged on my door... As soon as I opened it, I saw it was Scyth... Looking all serious like he did when he told me about Cooper's death... This time... It was Vilani who was hit... I felt as if I got hit with a brick as soon as I heard it... But luckily... Vilani wasn't**

murdered... Scyth told me she yelled for help when Mallow arrived... She was shot in her arm, and a medic said that her main artery got hit, which is always a deadly situation... Mallow rushed her to the sickbay while they did everything to keep her alive... For now, her situation is stable... I got dressed and got as quickly as I could to the sickbay... She was in a secured monitored room where you can only get in if you punched the code on the keypad... We weren't allowed to see her... Only Jarod was for a short moment... All we could do was to look through the window to see how she was doing... [br]

[br]

Jarod: V-Vilani...? Open you're eyes babe... P-Please... It's m-me... [br]

Vilani: \*gasps\* Jarod.....? Jarod.....![br]

[br]

***Vilani grabbed Jarod by his collar and gently pulled him down... And she whispered in his ear... [br]***

[br]

Vilani: J-Jarod... I know... I-I know who was behind the death o-of Cooper..... A-And it g-goes deeper then that... I-It's something you could never imagine... I heard them... [br]

[br]

Jarod: ... Who.....? [br]

Vilani: I-I can't tell you right now... The walls have ears... I don't know w-who to trust..... Tell sergeant Blain what I just told you..... [br]

[br]

Jarod: \*nods\* [br]

Vilani: I-I'm scared, Jarod... [br]

Jarod: We'll protect you... [br]

Medic: I'm sorry, but you have to go now. [br]

Jarod: Please, 5 more minutes... [br]

Medic: No, I'm sorry. You'll have to go. [br]

Jarod: \*sighs\* [br]

Vilani: Please..... [br]

Jarod: Sssh... It's ok..... We'll look out for you..... [br]

Vilani: \*nods slowly\* [br]

Jarod: Get some rest..... Hang in there, babe..... [br]

[br]

**A few moments later, Jarod got back to us... And he took me somewhere apart away from the others...[br]**

[br]

Jarod: Vilani knows who killed Cooper... She's in grave danger, sarge... He wants her dead because she knows..... [br]

[br]

Blain: Alright..... We'll secure the area..... Lieutenant Mallow? [br]

Mallow: Sir? [br]

[br]

**After Jarod told to Mallow with what he just told me, Mallow pointed three guys of his squad to stay on guard... [br]**

[br]

Mallow: Gino, Fabian, Eleanor? [br]

Gino/Fabian/Eleanor: Sir? [br]

Mallow: Stay here for the rest of the night. We'll take over in 5 hours. Don't let anyone near her. Use deadly force if necessary. Fabian, you'll stay inside the room with the medic. Eleanor, Gino, you'll be on guard outside. Questions? [br]

[br]

Gino/Fabian/Eleanor: No sir. [br]

Mallow: Check you're ammo... [br]

[br]

**Leaving Vilani was a hard thing to do... It was painful to see her like this, not to mention that she was pregnant... Who the hell would be so frackin' mental to shoot a pregnant woman...? The thought of it just pissed me off... Luckily, she was still alive and her condition was stable... We got three people who would watch her and made sure she was safe... So with that, the rest of us retreated... Thinking she was safe... [br]**

[br]

***One hour later... [br]***

[br]

Gino: Pssh... [br]

Eleanor: What? [br]

Gino: Can you believe this shoot...? [br]

Eleanor: Yeah... I know... It's frackin' madness... Who the hell could do something like this...? [br]

[br]

Gino: I don't know, but I'll swear I'll bite his frackin' head off if they know who did something as cowardly, low and disgusting like this... She's pregnant for fracks sake... [br]

[br]

Eleanor: Yeah... [br]

Gino: Pssh... [br]

Eleanor: You got a smoke? [br]

Gino: Yeah... Here...[br]

Eleanor: Thanks... Got a light as well...? [br]

Gino: ... \*gives lighter\* [br]

Eleanor: Thanks... [br]

Gino: ... [br]

Eleanor: But... The thing what's bothering me the most is- [br]

Gino: Ssh... [br]

Eleanor: What...? [br]

Gino: Someone's coming... Footsteps around the corner... [br]

[br]

***The both listened closely, and Gino gently tapped on the window to warn Fabian inside... Fabian nodded and got up with his weapon ready... The footsteps stopped... It stayed silent for an eerie while... [br]***

[br]

Gino: Check the corner... I got your back... [br]

[br]

***Eleanor carefully peeked around the corner and shines his flashlight in the poorly illuminated corridor while Gino slowly moved towards him... Nothing happened... No sounds, whatsoever... He looked back at Gino and gestured that everything was clear... Gino gently tapped on the window to get Fabian's attention and gestured that everything was clear... Fabian sat down again... [br]***

**[br]**

Eleanor: Guess it was just a- [br]

[br]

***At that point, a soft “clak” was heard... Eleanor dropped dead in front of Gino with a bullet-hole in his skull... [br]***

**[br]**

Gino: \*gasps\* Fa-![br]

[br]

***And another soft “clak” was heard... The bullet hit Gino in the back of his head as he too fell down dead to the ground... A large posture emerges from the darkness around the corridor while a smaller one emerges from behind where Gino was standing... They both got down so that they wouldn't be seen through the window... The large posture stands up when he's near the door... [br]***

**[br]**

???: What's the code the medic punched in.....? [br]

???: 3,1,0,8,8,7,0,1,6... [br]

???: You stay outside..... [br]

[br]

***Once the large posture punched in the code, he slowly opened the door... [br]***

**[br]**

Fabian: Whoa, what the-!![br]

[br]

***He quickly shot Fabian in the head before he had time to response... Once the medic saw that Fabian was dead, he reached out for his weapon, but he too got shot before he could respond... The large posture got out a syringe, and injected something in Vilani's arm... And waited... [br]***

**[br]**

***A short moment later, Vilani opened her eyes slowly... She looks in horror at the large posture who was sitting next to her... [br]***

**[br]**

Vilani: ... Y-You...? [br]

???: Yes... [br]

Vilani: ... D-Did you come to k-kill me...? [br]

???: I killed you ten minutes ago... When you were asleep... [br]

Vilani: A-Am I d-dieing.....? [br]

???: Yes... It won't hurt...[br]

Vilani: B-but... M-My b-baby.....[br]

???: Sssh... You're baby will be fine... [br]

Vilani: \*sobs\* B-But..... [br]

???: I'm truly sorry for doing this, Vilani... I really am... But I can't risk you telling them everything..... [br]

[br]

Vilani:\*sobs\* Y-you're secret i-is s-safe with... With m-me.....! I-I swear on m-my mother's s-soul, I-I w-wont t-tell a-anyone...![br]

[br]

???: I'm sorry, Vilani... I really am... But I can't... Sssh..... Close you're eyes..... [br]

**[br]**

***The large posture watches how Vilani passed away... He soon got joined by the smaller***

***posture that looks in disgust at Vilani's body... [br]***

***[br]***

???: \*shakes head\* ... I never agreed to this...

[br]

???: She jeopardized everything we stand for... You fracked it up before so I can set it right... [br]

[br]

???: I told you, I couldn't do... It's a lost cause we're fighting... GUN would never- [br]

[br]

***All of a sudden, the larger posture grabbed the smaller one by its neck and slammed him against the wall... Then he firmly pressed a pistol against his forehead...[br]***

[br]

???: Shut the frack up... You're proceeding as they told you to do... Keep in mind that I'm still watching you're every move... I can also put a bullet trough you're head if you try to jeopardize us again... You know what happened last time... Do you understand...? [br]

[br]

???: \*nods slowly\* [br]

???: Good... \*slowers pistol\* [br]

[br]

## 39 - Never be afraid again...

*Jarod's agony was heard throughout the base once he found out his Vilani passed away... It was bone-chilling to hear, and I was shocked when I heard the news... I had no words for it... People were starting to panic... In just two days, there have been 6 murders throughout the base... People started to point fingers towards each other while the tensions kept rising... It seemed as if no one trusted each other anymore... And we were all scared... [br]*

[br]

*Of course, it didn't stay a secret for a long time... By the end of the day, everyone knew about the murders that have been committed... But no one knew why... No one knew who was responsible for it... I believed that whoever was behind it, was trying to cause chaos... But why...? [br]*

[br]

*At around 1:30 noon, we went to see the others. They sat down quietly and were not talking... To my surprise, that human who brought Blain in was there as well... [br]*

[br]

Blain: How you guys feeling...? [br]

Tavish: \*shrugs\* [br]

Jones: \*sighs\* [br]

Mallow: What's there to feel about...? It's all fracking hopeless at this moment... [br]

Jones: Whoever is doing this... It's obvious he wants to create chaos and confusion among us... [br]

[br]

Tavish: What makes you think he's alone? [br]

Jones: What are you talking about? [br]

Tavish: There's no fracking way he can take 4 armed spec ops trained by the highest military standards on his own... For all I know it might have been you with someone else... [br]

[br]

Jones: What?!! [br]

Tavish: Yeah!! Where the hell were you when it all happened?!! [br]

Jones: Is that an accusation? [br]

Tavish: It might be...[br]

Jones: Do I need to remind you that I'm on your side this whole time?!! [br]

Tavish: When? [br]

Jones: Tell me something, Tavish... What the hell would I possibly gain by doing this, like you said I did...? [br]

[br]

Tavish: I didn't say you did it bu- [br]

Jones: No, no, no, don't crawl out like that. What would I gain? I'm wanted by the GUN. They want me dead more then anything. [br]

[br]

**Tavish was acting kinda strange. Why the hell would he accuse Jones for doing this? It was confirmed that Jones is indeed wanted by the GUN and they wanted him dead for some reason**

**or another... [br]**

**[br]**

Tavish: ... [br]

Jones: You got no answer to that, do you? [br]

Tavish: ... Scyth...? [br]

Scyth: What...? [br]

Tavish: What about you...? [br]

Scyth: What about me? [br]

Tavish: What would you possibly gain by delivering us to the GUN...? [br]

Mallow: Tavish, shut the frack up already... [br]

Scyth: If it's an accusation... I'll have to say that you're fracking mental... [br]

Tavish: Oh really...? And what makes you so fracking special that you couldn't have done this...?[br]

[br]

Scyth: ... It's because... [br]

Tavish: See, choking down in his own words already. [br]

Scyth: ... [br]

Nicole: ... Tell them Blain..... [br]

Blain: ... [br]

Scyth: \*sighs and nods to Blain\* [br]

Blain: It's because Scyth is like me... [br]

Tavish: ... What are you talking about? [br]

Blain: Scyth and I... We're both lifeforms... GUN wants to get rid of the lifeforms... Scyth couldn't have done this, because he simply wouldn't gain anything from it... The GUN would've shot him to pieces if he made contact with them... If they find out I'm a lifeform too, I'll be as good as dead out there as well...

[br]

[br]

**Then they all looked at me baffled... [br]**

[br]

Jones: ... You're a lifeform too...? [br]

Blain: \*nods\* [br]

Jones: What generation...? [br]

Blain: The Epsilon generation... Scyth is from the Sigma-Alpha generation... [br]

Jones: ... I never heard of an Epsilon generation... [br]

Blain: That's because it predates you... [br]

Jones: ... Hm. [br]

Scyth: How come you never heard of the Epsilon generation...? [br]

Jones: \*shrugs\* [br]

Blain: It's because all data about my generation is erased... Officially, I died many years ago... [br]

[br]

Jones: ... Were there more generations before you...? [br]

Blain: Yeah... The Alpha, Beta, Gamma and the Delta generation... They were considered to be the "frack up's" All of them died in early stages, and with each generation... They improved a bit... The Epsilon generation was the first stable generation to be deployed in the battlefield... [br]

[br]

Jones: I see... How many were there of the Epsilon generation...? [br]

Blain: Three in total, including me... Their all dead except for me... [br]

Jones: \*nods\* [br]

Blain: Why'd you ask...? [br]

Jones: Hm? [br]

Blain: Why'd you asked about the lifeform generations...? [br]

Jones: ... It's something I stumbled upon during the investigation... [br]

Mallow: What's it about? [br]

[br]

Jones: An informant gave me information about a project the GUN was working on... It's called the Blackbriar project... [br]

[br]

Blain: What's it about...? [br]

Jones: I don't know much about it... But... The Blackbriar project... They found out about the lifeforms... They want to clone the lifeforms to create an army... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Well that's bullshoo if you asked me... I saw Zakhaev killed hundreds of lifeforms... And now the GUN wants to save them so that they can clone 'em all? Bullshoo... [br]

[br]

Jones: ... Zakhaev wasn't with the GUN... He had his own army, and was supplied by the GUN... [br]

[br]

Scyth: \*shakes head\* [br]

[br]

**It stayed silent for a long time... [br]**

**[br]**

Tavish: Hm... [br]

Blain: What? [br]

Tavish: That sheds a whole new light on everything... What if the sergeant teamed up with his lifeform friend here to kill off the people who knew too much...? Heard them talk...? You always seem to hang around... Best buds right...? You had access to the sickbay, you knew how to get access... [br]

[br]

Blain: Tavish, you're going out of line here, I warn you... [br]

Tavish: With all due respect, sergeant, but you can go frack yourself... You and all the other fracking lifeforms caused this shoot in the first place... [br]

[br]

Scyth: ... [br]

[br]

**At that point, Scyth went berserk... He jumped up the table to get to Tavish, but he got so startled by the sudden burst of anger Scyth displayed, that he fell down from his chair... Scyth jumped on him and started to punch Tavish in the face over and over again. Tavish kicked him off of him, and jumped on the table. As soon Scyth jumped on the table to get to the other end again, Tavish kicked the table over with a tremendous force so that Scyth fell down, And once Scyth fell down on the ground face first, Tavish jumped on top of him of and dealt some serious blows to Scyth's head... Tavish used to be a boxer back at bootcamp, and whenever he was in a fight, you better get away from him when he's pissed... Scyth threw his head back to give Tavish a head-butt, and right after that, he managed to turn around and punch him off of him... Then Scyth jumped on him again punched him in the face again while Tavish grabbed him by his leg... He quickly yanked out Scyth's combat knife and stabbed him in his leg... Scyth yelled out in pain while Tavish yanked the knife out of Scyth's leg and he stumbled backwards and fell down... Everything was happening in a blink of an eye... And it got out of hand... Jones, Di-Angelo and**



**Saidah jumped on Tavish so that he couldn't recover and continue the fight... In the mean time, Scyth got up with a lot of effort and was about to attack him again, but I held him back with Nicole and Mallow... Scyth and Tavish called each other names and it took us a lot of effort to keep the two separated... At some point, Mallow carried Scyth over to the sickbay to let his leg taken care off... After a while, Tavish seemed to calm down...[br]**

**[br]**

Blain: The hell is wrong with you Tavish?!![br]

Tavish: Don't... fracking tell me what to do... I'm not some kid... [br]

Jones: No you're right... A kid would have more common sense then you... [br]

Tavish: Watch it, Jones... Of all the people here, I trust you the least... [br]

Jones: What's the reason...? [br]

[br]

**At that point, Tavish grabbed him by his collar and pulled him down... [br]**

**[br]**

Tavish: I don't need a reason... ... From now on... If you look at me in a way I don't like... I'll put a bullet trough your head...[br]

[br]

Jones: Careful... This uniform is more expensive then you're mom... [br]

Tavish: ... Watch you're back from now on... [br]

[br]

**He looked at Jones for a while until he let go of him... Then he walked away in a corridor... We all stared at him and saw how he walked away... [br]**

**[br]**

Di-Angelo: That guy has issues... [br]

[br]

**And with that, we all went out separate way... [br]**

**[br]**

*That night, there was another bang on the door... Just like the night before... Fear struck me again to hear the news of whoever it was delivering it... Blain was asleep... He was exhausted... So I opened the door... And Rico stood there, looking all serious... [br]*

*[br]*

Nicole: Hi Rico... [br]

Rico: Oh, hey... I wasn't expecting you... I didn't wake you did I? [br]

Nicole: No... What's wrong...? [br]

Rico: They know who did it... They know who was behind the murders... And they found him... [br]

[br]

Nicole: ... Who was it...? [br]

Rico: ... It was Tavish... [br]

Nicole: ... What? [br]

Rico: \*nods\* [br]

Nicole: Why...? Did he even had a motive...? [br]

Rico: \*shakes no\* Tavish committed suicide... We found things that connected him to the murders so...

[br]

[br]

Nicole: \*gasps\* [br]

[br]

*And so, I woke Blain up... Rico explained everything to him... They told me to stay while Blain went to the*

*scene with Rico...* [br]

[br]

**The moment I arrived... Everyone was there... Tavish sat in a chair, with a massive bullet-hole to the right side of his head, holding on to a pistol... The wall was splattered with blood and it was a nasty sight to see... Especially when it's someone you know... [br]**

**[br]**

Blain: ... \*sighs\* [br]

Rico: Look... We found this in his pockets... [br]

[br]

**He handed me a note where something was scribbled on... Once I unfolded it, it said 310887016...**

**[br]**

**[br]**

Blain: ... [br]

Rico: It's the code of the secured monitored room... [br]

Blain: ... Does anyone know what his motive could be...? [br]

Jones: \*shrugs\* You saw how he acted this afternoon... [br]

Mallow: And well... The deaths don't really seem to be connected with each other... It was as if he just randomly picked someone... [br]

[br]

Blain: Yeah but why...? [br]

Jones: Well maybe... Maybe he went coconuts after experiencing and seeing everything... It's not uncommon for that to happen... And... I actually saw it happening before... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... Yeah... \*sighs\* [br]

Rico: ... I guess that's it then... [br]

Blain: Whadda ya mean...? [br]

Rico: There's nothing else we could do... [br]

[br]

**One by one, we left the room... I was staying... I kept looking at Tavish's body and couldn't believe that he was responsible for Vilani's death and all the others... The moment I walked away, I felt that I stepped on something small and hard... I lifted up my foot and noticed a shell casing on the ground... I picked it up and looked at it for a moment... Then I placed it in my pocket, to walk out of the room and never to come back... [br]**

**[br]**

**And they were right... Tavish was behind the murders... As a few days passed by, nothing happened... The murdering stopped... As the days slowly passed by, I realized more and more that Tavish really did it... It was something hard to believe, but... Some people are just ticking time bombs waiting to explode... He was a guy I know for years, but I guess he just couldn't handle it anymore... And truth be told... I often wondered when my time would come when I would do something like that... [br]**

**[br]**

**Now that the murder incident was somewhat solved, didn't mean we could all go back to sleep... On the contrary... Without the tactical operations centre, shortage of ammo and supplies and with the knowledge the GUN was closing in on us, we were starting to get terrified. It wasn't a matter of "if" anymore... But it became a matter of when... It was inevitable... They were coming for us... And there was no way we could be prepared for what was coming... [br]**

**[br]**

*I woke up one night while I heard people yelling... And it just didn't stop... I heard a muffled explosion from above and saw dust of concrete falling down as the ground was shaking a bit... And I started to panic... I shook Blain awake and in our hurry, we got dressed very quickly... The moment I opened the door, I saw everyone running in different directions while they were in panic, not knowing what to do... And no matter who you asked what was going, they all replied the same... The GUN was here... I wasn't surprised when I heard that... I was just scared... Blain told me to find the others and hide somewhere... After running around for a long time, I found Lattei and Mahabi... Axel was found not long after that... More and more people started to follow us to the far back of the base, looking for a spot where we could be safe while we saw more and more soldiers going into the opposite direction... [br]*

**I got back as fast as I could to get my rifle... But reloading a rifle isn't easy with just one arm... Shooting one was difficult with just one arm... My left arm always supported the rifle, and seeing as it's a bionic arm, I could hold it perfectly still, which probably explained why I'm an excellent marksman... But now, it was useless... Out of frustration, I threw my rifle against the wall and got out my sidearm... I would most likely get killed for trying but I had to do something... You don't stand a chance against opponents with automatic assault rifles while you just wield a crummy pistol... But hell... It might as well be all over... [br]**

**I saw that Mallow was running towards the main gates so I followed him... Once we arrived, we noticed that a couple of hundred more were taking their positions at the massive doors... And the GUN was on the other side... The tension was unbearable as it stayed silent for an eerie while... I felt how nervous I became just by seeing everyone else being nervous as well... Not long after that, we heard the sounds of steel being deformed... You slowly saw the doors opening... I didn't know how they managed to do that... Maybe they short-circuited it or something... As soon as we first saw the human postures on the other side of the door, all hell broke loose... Bullet were whizzing by on both sides and with every shot fired, there had to be someone unlucky enough to be hit... They've underestimated our firepower... They haven't foreseen our resistance... Then they started to throw grenades while we did the same... You can imagine that it was an unfair fight... Lots of guys blew up... I saw how Mallow splattered apart... Di-Angelo was wounded... And I wasn't really contributing to the fight... So I did something I never did in my entire life... And that was to retreat while I carried Di-Angelo... [br]**

**[br]**

**[br]**

**Running through the corridors while I carried Di-Angelo wasn't exactly an easy job... He was way taller than me and heavy, but I did my best to run as fast as I could... I tried to stop the bleeding by pressing my hand on his stomach and as I ran through the corridors, I heard him screaming in pain. It echoed throughout the dark corridors and it was bone chilling to hear... Going left... Another left... Take a right... Almost there... I kicked down the door that was in front as the others looked baffled at us... Then they saw I carried Di-Angelo... I placed him down as gentle as I could... Rico took over from me as we all stared at the golden yellow lion with light brown manes... Di-Angelo's deep baritone scream once again echoed throughout the room as Rico tried to save his life...[br]**

**[br]**

*Saidah couldn't take it... She couldn't witness how her partner suffered like that... And truth be told, I couldn't either... His whole stomach was torn open and... There wasn't much that Rico could do. Everyone knew that he couldn't do much. The only thing Rico could do was to ease his suffering by drugging him... Di-Angelo stopped screaming and was breathing heavily as he looked at everyone... Rico*

*placed a blanket over him to keep him warm... Then Saidah kneeled next to Di-Angelo and talked to him... Kissing him on his forehead and kept assuring him everything was alright... It was so heartbreaking... We could see he was crying... She didn't... She was strong for him as she whispered in his ear... And at some point, he passed away silently... Then she just broke out in tears and crying her eyes out as we all just looked at the two lions... And there wasn't anything we could do... Everyone wished they could have done something, but all we felt was desolation and despair... I tried picking up Saidah and took her somewhere where we could be alone... She lay down on a bed as I sat on the edge of it, and she was crying her eyes out... I gave her a long firm hug, and although I knew words wouldn't help, I stayed silent... She wanted to be alone... I scratched her behind her ear and left...[br]*

[br]

*As I went back to the others, I sat down in a corner... Blain sat next to me not long after that... I looked him in the eyes and knew he was thinking the same thing... It got us thinking of how things could turn out like this... Why we were being chased down and why there was so much hate... We just didn't understand...[br]*

[br]

*And that's what happened to Blain and me over the months... I took a good look at Blain and he had a serious determined expression on his face... At some point, he looked at me... [br]*

[br]

Blain: Nic, listen up... [br]

Nicole: What is it...? [br]

Blain: One level below us, is a nuclear bunker... You know where it is right...? [br]

[br]

Nicole: \*nods\* [br]

Blain: It's a hydraulic pressure system, which means you need an authorization access code to get in... The authorization code is 7,7,5,6,9,8,4,3,2,1,0,1. Once the code is used, it'll stay open until you manually close it on the other side... Once it's closed, it'll go into quarantine mode, meaning you can only open the doors from the inside... Take Mahabi, Lattei and Axel with you to escort these people to the bunker... You'll be safe there... Rico...? [br]

[br]

Rico: Sir...? [br]

Blain: Try to find as many as you can to save... [br]

Rico: \*nods\* [br]

[br]

*And with that, Rico ran off... [br]*

[br]

Blain: Repeat the authorization code... [br]

[br]

Nicole: 7,7,5,6,9,8,4,3,2,1,0,1...[br]

Blain: Alright... Go now... [br]

Mahabi: Alright!! Let's go!! [br]

Lattei: Move it!! [br]

Mahabi: Nicole!! Come on!! [br]

[br]

Nicole: What about you...? [br]

Blain: I'll be there in a sec... [br]

[br]

*Blain could always lie without ever to flinch... It was his job to lie. He did it for so many years against*

*others, but some reason, he can't lie to me. His eyes gave that away... Just one small fragile thing in his eyes gave that away... [br]*

*[br]*

Nicole: N-No... You're lying... You're not coming back... [br]

Blain: ... Go... [br]

Nicole: You promised... [br]

Blain: ... [br]

Nicole: You promised...!! You promised we'd stick together!! [br]

Blain: Get her out of here!! [br]

*[br]*

*Lattei and Mahabi got hold of me and carried me away... I saw Blain standing there as I saw the lights flickering every once in a while... I yelled at them to let me go... But they didn't... And I saw that Blain kept looking at me... Once we got through the massive doors, some guy punched a button to close the massive hydraulic doors so that we could get access to the other side... I saw how the doors slowly closed as Blain was still looking at me... At that point, he ran off... Just like that... Once he turned around the corner, he was gone... So many promises were made but they were never to be realized... I didn't know what I was thinking... The gap between the doors got smaller and smaller... I struggled to get free, and jumped through the small opening... I must be mad... But I did anyways... I landed on my stomach on the other side and as I looked behind, I saw the gap was too small for anyone else to follow... I saw how Lattei, Mahabi and Axel were staring at me in disbelief, but they didn't follow me... I kept looking at them until the door closed... Then I got up and ran away... I was scared... Of course I was scared... But I got even more scared when I thought I was being followed... [br]*

*[br]*

**There wasn't much I could do... I saw from a distance our guys in numbers that exceeded over two thousand desperately tried to fight a way outside... I felt so helpless that I couldn't do anything... All I had was a pistol with a few rounds in it and a very poor aim... I closed my eyes and walked away from the scene... [br]**

**[br]**

**I walked in the room where Tavish committed suicide. I still saw the dried blood splattered wall and began to question things... Just what the hell was happening...? What went wrong so all of a sudden...? Why did Tavish committed suicide...? Why was Vilani murdered...? What was happening outside...? ...How did the GUN found out about me and Scyth...? I sat down in a corner trying to make sense out of everything... Come on, Blain... Come on... Think... Think..... There's gotta be some logic connection to everything... As soon as I sat down, I noticed something fell out of my pocket and it was that ejected shell I found on the scene when Tavish committed suicide... I picked it up and took a closer look at it... ".45 ACP ammo..." was encrypted on the side... And I stared at it for a while... [br]**

**[br]**

**Then it suddenly struck me... [br]**

**[br]**

**Jones: Oh! Yeah, their not... Their hollow pointed .45 ACP rounds... Doesn't inflict much damage as full cased ones... Their still deadly if you hit someone in the head though...[br]**

**[br]**

**???: I've been trying to find you for a while now... [br]**

**[br]**

**As soon as turned around, I aimed my gun at a human posture who stood in the doorway. By the sounds of her voice, she was a female. Once she got closer, I saw she had short hair, and that**

**was wounded... And then she sat down while she stared at me... I've never seen her before... [br]**

???: Lower you're gun... [br]

Blain: ... Who the hell are you...? [br]

???: Does the name Zakhaev ring any bells...? [br]

Blain: ... No... [br]

[br]

**I lied to her. I didn't know whether I could trust her or not... Her sleeve had a logo of the GUN...**

**[br]**

**[br]**

???: Oh...? That surprises me... You're the one who killed him after all... [br]

Blain: Who are you...? I'm not asking again...[br]

???: I'm Tanya... One of Zakhaev's... [br]

Blain: What are you doing here...? Shouldn't you be fighting us outside...? [br]

Tanya: \*shakes head\* No... I said I'm with Zakhaev, not with the GUN... [br]

Blain: ... Cut the fracking bullshoot and get to the point... \*aims pistol at Tanya\* [br]

[br]

**She sighed and looked at me for a moment... [br]**

*[br]*

Tanya: Haven't you ever wondered why Scyth was there in Robotropolis the night you met him...? [br]

[br]

Blain: ... Why? [br]

Tanya: ... When you had your finger on the trigger... And looked through the scope and saw Zakhaev...

Haven't you ever wondered why his contact was a furrie in the first place...? [br]

[br]

***"Fox: You just made the biggest mistake of your life...[br]***

***Blain: And why is that...? You deny us our freedom and rights...? GUN wiped out the whole fracking MNAF and what we're trying to do, is to protect our way of living...[br]***

***[br]***

***Fox: And what might that be, sergeant...? What is OUR way of living...? Hm...? Are we so different from the humans...?[br]***

***[br]***

***Blain: No... But they took everything from us... And you're helping them... That's a fact... So... Why...?[br]***

***[br]***

***The fox looked around... Scyth had his eyes focused on that fox as that fox looked at Scyth for a short time... But he never answered the question...[br]***

***[br]***

***Fox: I'm not a traitor... Feel free to call me one, because it reminds me that I have nothing in common with you... All of you ... If only you knew...[br]***

***[br]***

***Blain: ... The hell is that supposed to mean...?[br]***

***Fox: ...[br]***

***[br]***

***Scyth: Enough of this shoot... \*cocks pistol and aims at the head of the fox\*[br]***

***[br]***

***At that point, he shot the traitorous fox in the head, just like that..."[br]***

[br]

... At that point, I lowered my gun... [br]

[br]

Blain: What are you trying to say...? [br]

Tanya: Scyth is a lifeform... Just like you... You have a lot in common... Except there's one thing you don't know about him... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... Which is...? [br]

Tanya: I don't have much time... I had to sneak in... If they find out I made contact with you, they'll kill me for sure... And all would be lost... [br]

[br]

Blain: Just... Get to the point of what you're trying to say... [br]

Tanya: ... Scyth played you all for fools... [br]

Blain: What...?[br]

Tanya: \*nods slowly\* He's been with the ICA all this time...[br]

Blain: But why...? [br]

Tanya: Scyth was a prisoner a while back... He mentioned your name... I did my research on you but found very little information... Scyth on the other hand... Was with the ICA... It was a mistake to kill Zakhaev... [br]

[br]

Blain: Yeah but why?! [br]

[br]

Tanya: Zakhaev wasn't after Scyth because he's just a lifeform... Zakhaev uncovered the conspiracies Scyth was plotting against the GUN as ordered by the ICA, and for that reason, he chased him down! It was a mistake to kill Zakhaev! Zakhaev was the only one who knew what it was all about, and he was THIS close to end the war and set everything straight!! He was the only one that knew of the political situations and the ones responsible for it!! All he had to do, was to get as close as possible since they all trusted him!! [br]

[br]

Blain: What about this Miller guy...? [br]

[br]

Tanya: Miller was in it as well... That's why Zakhaev agreed to the deal with Scyth to take Miller out... As soon as Zakhaev was commander of the GUN legions, he had the power to turn the events of the war and bring back peace... But since there is so much corruption, it was kept silent until the time was right...! He didn't know who to trust... There is no doubt that Scyth had a contract to take Miller out, and Zakhaev wanted to find out who it was that sent Scyth... And once we knew who sent Scyth, there was no stopping us to take out those who were responsible inside the ICA... If Zakhaev would still be alive, then we would have had peace by now... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... fracking hell... [br]

Tanya: Zakhaev was our last hope for peace... And now, there is no stopping from GUN advancing in on us, and take us all out... This is just one big frack up, and because of that, a massive war broke out and Scyth was responsible for it as well... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... How many people are we talking about that are in the conspiracy...? [br]

Tanya: More than fifty politicians and bureaucrats... Probably more... [br]

Blain: How many did Zakhaev managed to take out...? [br]

Tanya: Thirty-six... Zakhaev had no choice but to eliminate them... It was too dangerous to keep them alive... [br]

[br]

Blain: ... Damn...[br]

[br]

Tanya: You think Miller did this all by himself...? Scyth only wanted to take out the biggest threat towards HIMSELF, and not to bring back peace... And now there's no stopping them from closing in on us and take out everyone... They will kill you... And ME...!! And they know you're a lifeform...[br]

[br]

Blain: ... Did Zakhaev had any proof...? [br]

Tanya: Plenty... But... Scyth managed to steal everything after Zakhaev's death except for this... \*gets out flashcard and gives it to Blain\* [br]

[br]

Blain: \*takes flashcard\* [br]

[br]

***"I noticed Scyth isolated himself with the briefcase Zakhaev was carrying...[br]***

***[br]***

***Blain: How you holding up...?[br]***

***[br]***

***As soon as he heard my voice, he immediately closed the briefcase and looked at me..." [br]***

***[br]***

***"Blain: What's with the briefcase...?[br]***

***Scyth: Oh... Eh... It's just some... Data about lifeforms... Including me... It should be destroyed... [br]***

***[br]***

Blain: ... What's this...? [br]

[br]

Tanya: This is the only thing that's left of Zakhaev's research of the conspiracies and corruption... Take good care of it... It contains names, dates, places, everything... And even though this will never end in a good way for us, I do hope you can end it all so that everyone else can live and grow old in peace... Cloning must be outlawed if we want to survive the future... If there's some... Clone army dictatorship, we're all bound to it ... I doubt to survive much longer myself...[br]

[br]

Blain: ... I'm sorry to hear that...[br]

Tanya: I wish you the best of luck, Blain... Hopefully, it'll end soon for us... Good luck... [br]

[br]

Blain: \*nods\* Thanks, Tanya... Take care... [br]

[br]

Tanya: \*nods\* [br]

[br]

**I walked out of the door, thinking about everything she said... As soon as I gently closed the door, I heard a muffled pistol shot... I went back to see what happened, even though I already knew... Tanya shot herself in the head as she was holding on to a necklace in her left hand... Then I ran away... I saw that Rico was standing there not too far away... [br]**

**[br]**

Rico: I heard everything sarge..... So..... It's all over.....? We've lost.....? [br]

Blain: \*shakes no\* [br]



Rico: Huh...? [br]

Blain: Follow me, quickly, before it's too late. [br]

Rico: ... What? [br]

Blain: Hurry up!! [br]

[br]

**The two of us ran towards a computer room while I clenched my hand around the flashcard, making sure I wouldn't lose it. On the way, we saw Jarod too and I told him to come along... Once we arrived in the computer room, I told them to look for other flashcards, and after totally turned the place upside down, we found a few more flashcards. But we were running out of time... I handed the flashcard I was holding to Rico, and he inserts the flashcard, and made 2 more copies for himself and Jarod... [br]**

**[br]**

Blain: You have to take these copies, and get as far away from here as possible! If you run into GUN troops, surrender immediately, and let them take you as a POW! Don't say anything, just hand over the flashcard when you're interrogated![br]

[br]

Jarod: Sarge...? [br]

Blain: Do it, Jarod, that's an order!![br]

Jarod: I-I can't I-leave... Not after s-so many- [br]

Blain: Do it!! [br]

Jarod/Rico: ... [br]

Blain: You have to split up in different directions! I wish you guys the best of luck... And I hope that it'll all be over soon... [br]

[br]

Rico: What are these things...? [br]

Blain: The truth...[br]

[br]

Jarod: ... But... What about you, sarge...? [br]

Blain: ... We got 3 copies now... Hopefully, that'll be enough... [br]

Rico: But... Wh-What if we don't make it...? [br]

Blain: Rico... No one is supposed to be honored for what is expected from them... And people expect us to end the war... You're not the new guy anymore, and you know that... [br]

[br]

Rico: \*nods quickly\* [br]

Blain: Now go... [br]

Jarod: Take care sarge... [br]

Blain: Go...[br]

[br]

**And with that, they both looked at me for a short moment... Then they ran off... That was the last time I saw Rico and Jarod... [br]**

[br]

**I scrolled through the data to get a clue of what was happening... I wanted to see if Tanya was right about Zakhaev... And Scyth... The moment I opened the files, I saw immediately what it was all about... It was crystal clear all of a sudden and things made sense... [br]**

**[br]**

**Lifeforms... Everything that is happening outside, this whole deal revolved around lifeforms... Six hundred and seventy eight lifeforms, ranging from size, strength, and species... Robotnik had**

them scattered all over the planet in his cryochamber laboratories... The ICA took over the lifeforms after the first war ended... That's where Robotnik and Zakhaev came in... Robotnik knew the lifeforms posed a threat once it was known they were on the loose... Robotnik wanted to destroy his own creations... Why, no one will ever know. Maybe he wanted to destroy them because he knew the ICA got their hands on his creations and that they may pose a threat to his new empire... Whatever it was, Robotnik sent Zakhaev and his mercenaries in to take out the lifeforms, knowing how dangerous Robotnik's creations are... Then Robotnik got assassinated by Scyth... Robotnik got replaced by Miller as Zakhaev continued his mission... Over the years, Zakhaev managed to take out five hundred and sixty four lifeforms, but that wasn't enough... One hundred and fourteen lifeforms are still alive to this day, including Scyth and the rest of the Sigma-Alpha generation... The ICA however, wanted to clone those remaining lifeforms and create a whole army to take over... And it all happened in secrecy, until Scyth assassinated Robotnik... "Project Blackbriar"... [br]

[br]

Scyth: I never wanted things to turn out like this...[br]

[br]

**I turned around and noticed Scyth had Nicole in a headlock, using her as a shield and he aimed a pistol at me... [br]**

[br]

Blain: Let her go!! [br]

Scyth: Not after you heard me out... [br]

Blain: ... Then why'd you do it...? [br]

**[br]**

**He slowly got closer to me as his eyes coldly fixated on mine... I saw Nicole crying quietly as tears were running down her face...[br]**

**[br]**

Scyth: You're asking ME why...? [br]

Blain: ... Yeah. [br]

Scyth: You know the answer yourself all too well... You've been there... [br]

Blain: ... The hell you talking about...? [br]

[br]

Scyth: You're a lifeform too, Blain... You experienced everything... You got hunted down as well... But you managed to escape from it and find peace... That was something all the other generations never had... Including me... Zakhaev hunted us down with the intention to wipe us all out... So we had no choice but to turn to the ICA for protection from the GUN... And we got caught up in a circuit of conspiracies and corruption... But we did everything to be protected from the GUN... The ICA had a plan to legalize cloning... To create a clone army of lifeforms... And with the current government, that wasn't gonna happen... The first task... Was to eliminate those who could stop us... Then a clone army of lifeforms would see the day of light... I never could do anything about it... I'm against it, just as much as you... But I had no choice... I was the one who released that virus in Robotropolis a long time ago... It was a last desperate attempt to get rid of our oppressors, but to no avail... Then all hell broke loose... \*sighs\* [br]

[br]

Blain: \*shakes head\* [br]

Scyth: You would have done the same in my situation... I know you would've... [br]

Blain: You're saying that this was inevitable to happen...? [br]

Scyth: Yeah... I'm truly sorry, Blain... [br]

Blain: So everything was a lie then...? [br]

Scyth: \*shakes no\* No... Not everything... [br]

Blain: ... What wasn't a lie then...? [br]

Scyth: Vanessa... The young human girl I found and took care of her 'till she died... And... Considering you as an older brother... That wasn't a lie... You saved my life once... And I'm truly grateful to that... We can still set this right... We're lifeforms... And together with the surviving lifeforms, we can still win... We can overthrow the ICA and end it all... We-[br]

[br]

**All of a sudden, I felt as if I could explode in anger... Memories were rushing by of the people I loved who passed away in this world because of a lie... My "family", friends... My guys... I noticed my right hand was starting to shake severely as I clenched my teeth... Then all of a sudden, I pulled out my gun and aimed it at Scyth... [br]**

**[br]**

Blain: WE are NOTHING but creations of a mad man who enjoyed playing with genetic toys!!! It's wrong, and you frackin' know it!! [br]

[br]

Scyth: But... The ICA can still- [br]

[br]

Blain: frack the ICA!!! They took away everything from me I ever cared for!!! Everything I build up over the years!!!! Everything that took so much effort to get!!! EVERYTHING!!! I don't give a shoot whether or not you care about me!!! You were part of the ICA who took away everything from everyone!!! From Nicole and ME!!! You killed Vilani!!! She was pregnant for fracks sake!!! [br]

[br]

Scyth: I didn't kill Vilani... That wasn't me... Please... You can blame me a lot, but not for her death... I cared as much for her as you did...[br]

[br]

Blain: Yet you helped Jones to take her life... [br]

Scyth: ... So you know then... [br]

Blain: ... Yeah... I know it all too well now...[br]

Scyth: \*sighs\* ... Just... Give me the flashcard and I'll let you and Nicole go... I don't wanna kill you,

Blain... Please...[br]

[br]

Blain: I'll put a bullet between your eyes, you sick frack... [br]

Scyth: I beg you, Blain... Please... [br]

Blain: frack... Off... [br]

Scyth: So it's like that...? You're turning you're back on me now.....? [br]

Blain: Lifeforms like you don't deserve to live... [br]

Scyth: \*sighs\* Alright... Time for plan B then... Let's just kill each other... [br]

[br]

**He pushed Nicole aside as he opened fire... I got down as quickly as I could... I tried to get my aim, but it was so difficult... I tried to shoot him, but I kept missing him, and I realized I couldn't waste anymore shots, seeing as I was low on ammo... I looked up and noticed that there was a glass roof where Scyth was hiding... I fired two shots at the glass roof and it shattered to pieces, and all the pieces landed on Scyth... I heard him yell and curse, and he got out from where he was hiding. I saw he had cuts all over his body and was bleeding severely in his face... As soon as I saw that, I got down as low as possible and tried to shoot him... I hit him in the leg where Tavish stabbed him... I hid immediately again after I shot him, and crawled away to the other side... Once I peeked around the corner, I had a clear shot on his head... I took a deep breath... Aligned the**

sight with his head... I held my breath while my finger was gently clenched around the trigger... "Pull it slowly"... Then I heard a click... Scyth looked up surprised... I firmly closed my eyes... [br]

[br]

Scyth: Mwuaha... You sneaky little bugger... You cheeky fracker... You almost blew my head off... What's wrong, Blain...? Hm...? You're panting and sweating, and huffing and puffing... Face it, you're getting old... [br]

[br]

Blain: F-frack you... [br]

Scyth: We still have a lot in common you know... You, me... You know what it's like... I would have pulled the trigger by now... All it takes is one bad day and you'd be just like me...[br]

[br]

Blain: ... No... Th-that's not it, Scyth... All it takes is a bit more combat experience and... Two big @\$\$ scars... And be a little modest every now and then... And you'd be just like me...[br]

[br]

Scyth: \*shakes no\* Sorry Blain, I'm an ambitious guy and you... [br]

[br]

**All of a sudden, he took his aim again... And he fired at me... It just happened so fast... I felt how the bullet penetrated my chest... And it all comes back now... The feeling that you get when you're dieing... What's worse was... I realized I was dieing... I felt my hand reaching to my chest where I felt the impact... And as I looked down, I noticed dark red blood on my hand... And Nicole was witnessing everything... I heard her yelling... I tried to get up and run away but... I couldn't... As soon as I wanted to make the first step, I fell down on my stomach... In that sudden burst of panic I felt, I wanted to get away... Either by crawling or... I didn't know... I couldn't think. All I could think off was that I had to get away somehow, even though I knew this was the end of the line for me... [br]**

[br]

Scyth: You're just a dead weight to my ambitious plans... [br]

[br]

**He aimed his gun at me again. At that point, Nicole jumped on him and started punching him... Scyth pushed Nicole back, and aimed his gun at her and pulled the trigger... To my relief, I heard a "click", meaning he was out of bullets... Then Nicole punched him in the face again, but Scyth pistol-whipped her and she fell down on the floor... Scyth felt his cheek and glared at Nicole and me... He yanked the flashcard out of the PDA... Then he walked off, disappearing like a shadow, as if he never existed... [br]**

[br]

**Nicole couldn't talk... Neither could I... All I could do was gasping for air as I slowly felt weaker and weaker... All Nicole did was holding my hand... She wasn't crying... She held me close as she whispered in my air of how much she loved me... I wish she didn't... It just made everything more painful to accept... [br]**

[br]

***Many hours later...[br]***

[br]

Scyth: That's it. [br]

???: You got everything...? [br]

Scyth: \*nods and shows flashcard\* [br]

???: Good, hand it over... [br]

Scyth: You got my hit-fee...? [br]

???: Plenty... [br]

Scyth: It better be worth it... After all the things I sacrificed to ensure our survival... I never wanted this.....[br]

[br]

???: What's done is done... There'll be peace soon...[br]

Scyth: \*sighs\* We have to mobilize the other lifeforms and take things in our own hands now... The Blackbriar project should be ready in a couple of weeks... I hope you got what you wanted..... [br]

[br]

???: \*nods\*... [br]

Scyth: Alright... \*sighs\* Place me into cryogenic state and... Hopefully one day I'll wake up and there will be peace... [br]

[br]

???: \*nods slowly\*[br]

[br]

***As Scyth grabbed his briefcase, he opened it up and checked if everything was there... [br]***

***[br]***

???: Satisfied...? [br]

Scyth: \*nods\* [br]

[br]

***Then Scyth walked away with the briefcase... [br]***

***[br]***

???: Scyth...? [br]

Scyth: What...? [br]

???: I can not help but to wonder... [br]

Scyth: What? [br]

[br]

***Then the person walks up to him and took off his glasses... [br]***

***[br]***

???: You'd said you were against the Blackbriar project... And yet you want to participate... Why...? [br]

[br]

Scyth: ... Everything for the survival of our species... Semper Fi... [br]

???: Haven't they told you...? [br]

Scyth: Told me what...? [br]

???: You've been excluded from the project... [br]

[br]

***Then the person grabbed a pistol and firmly pressed it against Scyth's forehead... [br]***

***[br]***

???: Because after all...[br]

Scyth: ... Oh you gotta be fracking kidding m-[br]

[br]

***At that point, the person pulled the trigger... Scyth drops dead in front of the human... [br]***

***[br]***

???: You're still just a furry who knows too much...[br]

[br]

***The human looked at Scyth for a short moment and wiped his glasses clean... [br]***

***Then he picks up the briefcase and walks away into the cold night... [br]***

**[br]**

**So that's it... No dieing monologue... No dramatic scenes you always see in movies... I just died after being alive for more then 40 years in a row... Betrayed by the one I trusted the most... Maybe it was for the better... The story ends for me, but Nicole had to bare every consequences of it... And I could see everything from where I am now... I couldn't witness what happened to her, but I couldn't do anything... All I could do was to wait until her time came... Maybe one day, it'll all be back like it used to be... [br]**

**[br]**

**Maybe one day I will wake up and realize it was all a dream... Or that it is a vision of what the future might hold in store for me. Maybe one day someone will find out about my memoirs, and share it to whoever wants to listen. Maybe one day I will look back at my life and realize that fighting wars for others was the only decent thing I did on this forsaken planet... Regrets...? None... Because it shaped me into the person I am today... It's because it brought Nicole to me... She knows all to well I loved her deeply, even though I rarely showed it... Which is why it was so painful to leave her... I didn't want her to experience what was gonna happen to her... Because I know what was gonna happen... But she experienced it anyway and there was nothing I could do to change it... Hopefully, one day, she'll find peace, like I do now... [br]**

**[br]**

## 40 - And they all lived happily ever after...

*I held his hand as Blain passed away silently... I lay down next to him and cuddled him as tears flowed down my cheek and hit his... And at that same moment, that same desolate feeling came back I once had many years ago...*

*The sounds of gunshots started to fade off to the point it was total silence... I heard boots running through the corridors and every now and then, I heard a short fire fight... At that point, I realized that the GUN breached the base... But I didn't run away...*

*It didn't take long before I got noticed... I saw a group of soldiers coming towards us as I still held on to Blain crying. They looked at us for a short moment as they aimed their weapons on us... Then they realized Blain already died... They violently pushed me on the ground, as one of them firmly pressed his knee between my shoulder blades... The kneecap of the soldier hurt a lot in my back as another soldier cuffed me... They lifted me up by my arms and once I stood on my legs, I got a black bag shoved over my head... And it all turned dark... I was forced to walk with them, and they literally threw me inside of something. I couldn't see what it was I was being thrown in. I heard jet engines... For hours, I couldn't see... Breathing was difficult through that bag... Why they didn't shoot me on the spot is something I will never know...*

*Many hours later, I got pushed again... Got forced to walk... They threw me again... They picked me up, and forced me to sit down... And then finally, the black bag got taken off of my head... It was a small, dark room... Two guards stood by the door as another person came in... He shines a bright flashlight in my face as I could only see black figures of large humans in front of me...*

Interrogator: Do you know why you're here?

Nicole: No... Please...

Interrogator: You've been formally charged with three counts of murder, the bombing of government property, conspiracy to commit terrorism, and treason to the empire. The penalty for which is death by firing squad. You have one chance and only one chance to save your life. You must tell us the identity or whereabouts of Sigma-Alpha 301. We know you had contact with him. If your information leads to his apprehension, you will be released from this facility immediately. Do you understand what I'm telling you?

Nicole: I-I... D-don't... I-I didn't do anything.....

Interrogator: We know.

Nicole: N-No p-please...!

Interrogator: Process her.

*The two guards, who stood near the door, dragged me off the chair and into another room, which looked like a prison shower... I didn't see any shower heads, but I did saw drains... They told me to undress after I got hit a few times... Then they hung me up by my tail as they released hot boiling steam over*

my body...

*After I got thrown in a cell, I crawled over to a puddle of water that was leaking through the roof, and stared at it. And I saw a reflection of myself, covered in bruises, cuts and a black eye... I still saw the stale bread left over from previous prisoner and I saw a mouse coming out of a gap in the wall... He sniffs the bread, and then runs off again... I guess even the mouse doesn't like it...*

*I didn't know what it was like to be alive anymore... To actually feel the warm sun on you... To feel the blistering cold... The touch of water... The wind in your hair... Memories of how it all used to be and all the feelings I had floated upwards... The things I've experienced over the years and the people I've seen passing away over the months... The only thing I did every day in my cell was crying... I was starting to lose my mind...*

*I was seeing things in the pitch black at night... I was starting to get ill... I was sick... Every time I looked in the puddle of water and saw my reflection, I stared at someone who wasn't me... Little wounds on my body which stung... My fur turning pale and mat... I literally saw myself rotting away... It actually felt like that...*

*Being hit every day to know something I didn't know was unbearable... It went on for months, maybe even years... I didn't know... But one day, I wasn't afraid of them anymore...*

*That day, I got thrown in the interrogator cell for the last time, and yet again, he shined a bright flashlight in my face... This time, it was different... I wasn't afraid no longer...*

Interrogator: I am instructed to inform you that you have been convicted by special tribunal and that unless you are ready to offer your cooperation you are to be executed. Do you understand what I'm telling you...?

Nicole: ... Y-Yes...

Interrogator: ... Are you ready to cooperate...?

Nicole: ... N-No... \*shakes head\*

Interrogator: Very well.

*And not long after that, I got thrown in my cell again...*

*I received a letter as well... A guard walked by and dropped it through the bars... I crawled over to it, and hesitated to read it at first... But when I finally had the guts to open the letter, I wasn't shocked by its content... This was just bound to happen... It was a death warrant...*

*"On behalf of the Empire I am instructed to inform you that you have been convicted by special tribunal.*

*You have been formally charged with three counts of murder, the bombing of government property, conspiracy to commit terrorism, and treason to the empire. The penalty for which is death by firing squad.*

*The sentence will be carried out on:*



Tuesday 11th of December 3156

May there be mercy on you're soul.

Sincerely,

Second-class Lieutenant Paul D. Jackson  
Commander of the Phoenix National Guard Regiment”

*I knew that this was coming... They knew it was coming... So why the hell did they bother to write a letter...? Trying to be formal...? Pssh... It was a waste of ink and paper... And the accusations... They wanted to know where Scyth was... So why did they falsely accuse me of things I never commit...? It's because they needed a reason... A reason to keep me in that prison for so many months... Officially, Scyth doesn't even exist... Keeping me in that prison and tell them about Scyth's existence wouldn't be acknowledged by officials... So they falsely accused me of things I didn't commit so that they had a reason to execute me if I wouldn't tell them... But for some reason... The execution was never realized... I was just another victim of political games...*

*The copies that Blain made of that flashcard turned to be a crucial turn in the events of the war... It was inevitable for Rico and Jarod that they were also captured by GUN troops, but they're flashcards got examined when they got strip searched... They were taken to a different facility... The GUN also did their research, just like we did, but the GUN and we both came to a dead end... Those flashcards turned to be the missing link... GUN started to focus on the ICA once they knew about it... The cloning project got intercepted just in time... More then four hundred people were arrested and charged with acts of war and violating civil rights... Three hundred and fifty four people faced execution, while the rest served life sentence in a maximum secured prison... All the lifeforms got their life-support shut down while they were in state of suspended animation in their cryochambers and died... And so... The war was over in a blink of an eye... And the hunt for the surviving lifeforms began...*

*Out of the thousands of refugees and soldiers in the base, only seventy eight furies and humans survived... The only reason why they survived is because of the nuclear shelter... Sometimes I wished I stayed there...*

*Rico and Jarod were considered to be heroes for ending the war. They always said that Blain was the real hero, but they didn't commemorate him as much as they did with Rico and Jarod... It's because they were still alive... But I think Blain was a hero just as much as Rico and Jarod... The oldest lifeform ever to be created, deflected, contributed in ending the first war, who gave me a chance of happiness and he gave me the most precious gift someone could ever offer... His love... But if you asked Blain if he was a hero, he would probably say that he's not... He would simply just say "No...". But he was still a hero to me... Just as much as everyone else I ever met during the war...*

*A few months after the war, Jarod couldn't take it anymore... He was mentally instable after killing his lifelong friend who was mortally wounded and the death of his beloved Vilani and their unborn kitten... So Jarod placed a pistol in his mouth... Leaving Rico as the only survivor of Blain's squad...*

*Even when the war was over for more then a year, they never came for me to get me out... They just simply forgot about me and everyone else who was imprisoned here. We did see soldiers... But*

*as the months passed by, we saw them lesser and lesser...*

*Kaelyn often visited me while I was in my cell... She always came when I cried... Like she knew... And she always asked the same question... Why I was crying... And I always answered the same... Some of the guards always looked baffled at me... Maybe it was because they were wondering what a little child was doing in my cell... A cell isn't a place for a kid to be in... But Kaelyn stayed for a few hours... And whenever she had to go again, I always told her not to wonder off too far... It's dangerous to wander around alone...*

Kaelyn: Why are you crying.....? \*wipes tear away\*

Nicole: I'm just happy to see you, baby..... That's all..... \*caresses Kaelyn's head\*

Kaelyn: Mom.....?

Nicole: Yes.....?

Kaelyn: I'm always you're friend right.....?

Nicole: \*smiles weakly\* Yeah..... \*kisses Kaelyn's forehead\*

Kaelyn: \*smiles\*

Nicole: You know.....

Kaelyn: \*whispers\* What.....?

Nicole: Look outside...

Kaelyn: Eh...?

Nicole: Just look... You see it...?

Kaelyn: The moon and the stars...?

Nicole: Yes... \*smiles\*

Kaelyn: What about it...?

Nicole: I've seen so many sunrises and sunsets with you're dad... And even though I'll never see one again, I know some day I will...

Kaelyn: Why are there so many stars...?

Nicole: Well... Some say, that... When you pass away, your soul goes up to the heavens and takes its place in the skies... They'll watch over you while you're asleep, disguised as stars... And sometimes... They'll even visit you... In the form of a dream... And whenever you feel lonely, or sad... Just look up to them... And they'll guide you through... They always do...

Kaelyn: You think that daddy is up there...?

Nicole: I know he's there...

Kaelyn: \*smiles\*

*We cuddled for a long time when she let go of me... She looked at me, kissed my cheek and told me she had to go... It was always a difficult time for me when she had to go... But then again, she's growing to be quite an independent young lady... And at some point, you'll have to take a step back... I never wanted her to get hurt... But she's a smart girl... She knows what she's doing... I couldn't get up myself... Instead, she bends over and hugged me... She told me how much she loved me... Then she let go... And walked off in the darkness...*

Nicole: I-I luff you t-too, baby..... I-I luff you so m-mu-much.....

Guard: .... Who the hell is she talking to.....?

Guard 2: Oh, her. Don't mind her, she's frackin' mental.

Guard: I know but... Why is she here in the first place?

Guard 2: \*shrugs\*

Guard: Ah well. Got a cigarette?

Guard 2: Yeah, sure.

*And then one day... There were no more soldiers... They stopped coming... And they forgot about us...*

*We haven't seen soldiers in four days now... We didn't receive any food or water anymore... The only way I kept myself from dehydrating was to drink the water that was seeping through the roof, and the puddle of water in my cell... But... That night, I woke up... I thought I heard a familiar voice... I got up from my bed and stumbled towards the cell door... Then I heard it again... It was Blain... He said he was coming to get me out... I yelled and begged him to take me with him... Then the awful truth came to light, as I realized Blain already died a long time ago... Then I just fell down on the ground...*

*I cried myself to sleep that night... Quietly... No one heard anything... As soon as I woke up, I felt the nice warm sun shining on my face... I focused my eyes to get a better vision... No longer was I in a cell... Huge open grass plains, surrounded by the big forest like it was back home... There wasn't a living soul I encountered as I walked, and I even walked by the lake that was near my house... As I bent over to see my own reflection, I saw I was young again... I looked at my arms and the wounds disappeared... My fur was glossy and violet again... My tail felt flexible... I noticed a reflection of someone standing behind me. As I turned around, I saw it was Cody... Cody smiled at me and gestured to get up the hill... I ran towards him and saw the village along with everyone else... As everyone gathered around me and hugged me, I saw Blain standing in the distance with a girl I've seen a long time ago...*

*I died in a cold cell on a cold December night when I was 43 years old and passed away in my sleep... Silent... Peaceful... Alone... That's all I ever wanted ever since this began... It seems strange that my life ended in such a terrible place, but for twenty three years I had all I ever wanted... But I perished in a cell, all alone, which was something I never imagined when I was young... And every inch of me perished in that cell... Every inch of me, except of one. One inch... It's small and fragile and it's the only thing in the world worth having... We must never lose it or give it away... We must never let them take it away from us... I hope that whoever you are, you understand what I'm telling you... I hope that the world is a better place in the future, and that things will get better... And that something so horrible and meaningless this thing called "war" may never return... But what I hope most of all is that you understand what I mean when I tell you that, even though I don't know you, and even though I may never see you, laugh with you, cry with you, or hold you, I love you. With all my heart, I love you...*

*I am where I am now...*

**Fifty years later...**

Tv: Nations have always build monuments for their heroes. Tributes to the defence against or the conquests of other nations. But the monument here, doesn't favour one nation over another. It is the first of its kind, to commemorate the enduring survival of a species. Our species. More importantly, it commemorates the men and women, who gave the world faith, gave Mobius a future and made Mobians, believe again. So it's no surprise the piece itself is special. Begun 3 years ago, in the year 3202, the monument is a diorama build entirely by hand. It is a three dimensional snapshot of Azerbaijan

and the soldiers, who took to it that day. The scene has been reproduced with painstakingly attention to detail, and authenticity. Only the men and woman who were there know it better. For the first time in 50 years, First Medical Officer Rico from the 506<sup>th</sup> regiment and the only remaining survivor this day, he returns to the scene where it was all happening...

Tv: It's eh... Strange... To... To see everything again... I've been denying it for so many years and... I never thought I would return... This is exactly how it was 50 years ago... Nothing changed... And... It should stay that way... People shouldn't forget what happened here a long time ago...

Tv: What do you think this place means...?

Tv: It tells a story...

Tv: What kind of story...?

Tv: It tells a story about betrayal... Courage... Sorrow... I don't know... A thousand words don't mean anything to me when I see it again... I can't tell what it feels like... You had to be there to know what I'm feeling right now...

\*long silence\*

Tv: How did you managed to live with it...?

Tv: Ehm... The sergeant... He... He once told me that... That no one should be honoured for what is expected from them...

Tv: ... Did you believe that...?

Tv: ... Yes... Yes, and I still do...

Tv: \*screen fades away to a news studio\*

Tv: Yes, that was eh... quite a story... Today it's been exactly fifty years since the conflict ended and there will be a memorial service tonight at the Shuhia Taiba to remember the casualties of that dreadful conflict. ERTC will broadcast the memorial live tonight at eight. And in other news, military intervention to break up the riots in the capital of Sitembileq caused the death of over-

Rachel: \*sighs and turns TV off\*

*I woke up one night... For... No particular reason... I had a bad dream but as soon as I opened my eyes I forgot what it was about...*

**The end...**

# 41 - Faq, funfacts and bloopers

## FAQ

### #1 What the hell does Semper Fidelus mean?!

Semper Fidelus is Latin, meaning, "Always faithful". It can be interpreted in many ways, for example, Nicole being always faithful to Blain, Jarod will always be faithful to Vilani, Blain who stays faithful towards his squad and all that. I thought the title fit very well with the story and overall events happening.  
=3

### #2 Is this really your last story...?

Yuuuuush... Because... There's nothing much left to write. You know Blain and Nicole's past, present and future.. So... To line it up...

Deus Ex Machina: Blain's Past

Sidera somnum suadent: Nicole's past and present. Blain's present.

Semper Fidelus: Nicole and Blain's future.

### #3 Who was the dude who killed Scyth in the end...?

I left you some hints to figure it out yourself... Do you know...? X3

**If you got more questions, let me know.**

## FUNFACTS

# The mustang character who's called Eleanor is taken from the Shelby Mustang GT500 "Eleanor". One of most beautiful cars ever to be created...

# The term "Caldish" was taken from the movie Titanic. Near the end of the movie, the submarine was called the Caldish.

# Longest story I ever did. It even exceeded my Randomness series... XP

# I created a different document that contained all the ideas, plots and dialogue for me as a base to write the story. Total number of pages of that document: 44 pages.

# Some of the scenes described in the story are based on actual events that happened during the second world war.

# Azerbaijan is a real country.

# Epsilon, Sigma, and Alpha are symbols from the Greek alphabet. Epsilon is the 5th character, Sigma

is the 18th character, and Alpha is the 1st character of the alphabet.

# The number of times the word “frack” appeared in this story: 6417 times. O\_o ( such potty mouth... DX )

### **BLOOPZ0RZ ( I love this part! X3 )**

Blain: ... And another thing, I really want-

Jarod: Sir!!

Blain: ... \*sighs\* What is it Jarod?

Jarod: Battlewalkers spotted a few clicks north east of our position! Their being escorted by tanks and infantry of around 30 men!

Blain: Yeah that's nice. Anyway, Tavish?

Tavish: Yes sir?

Blain: I think I've made it perfectly clear... And yet no one obeyed that command... There is a lack of discipline in the regiment and I wanna know why...

Tavish: What command, sir?

Blain: No one... Is allowed... to enter... MY room...!

Jarod: Bu-Bu- But sir!! The battlewalkers!!

Blain: No, they can't come in my room either.

All of a sudden, I felt as if I could explode in anger... Memories were rushing by of the people I loved who passed away in this world because of a lie... My “family”, friends... My guys... I noticed my right hand was starting to shake severely as I clenched my teeth... Then all of a sudden, I pulled out my gun and aimed it at Scyth...

Blain: WE are NOTHING but creations of a mad man who enjoyed playing with genetic toys!!! It's wrong, and you fracking know it!!

Scyth: But... The ICA can still-

Blain: frack the ICA!!! They took away everything from me I ever cared for!!! Everything I build up over the years!!!! Everything that took so much effort to get!!! EVERYTHING!!! I don't give a shoot whether or not you care about me!!! You were part of the ICA who took away everything from everyone!!! From Nicole and ME!!! You killed Vilani!!! She was pregnant for fracks sake!!!

Scyth: I didn't kill Vilani... That wasn't me... Please... You can blame me a lot, but not for her death... I cared as much for her as you did...

Blain: Yet you helped Jones to take her life...

Scyth: ... So you know then...

Blain: ... Yeah... I know it all too well now...

Scyth: \*sighs\* ... Just... Give me the flashcard and I'll let you and Nicole go... I don't wanna kill you,

Blain... Please...

Blain: I'll put a bullet between your eyes, you sick frack...

Scyth: I beg you, Blain... Please...

Blain: frack... Off...

Scyth: So it's like that...? You're turning you're back on me now.....?

Blain: Lifeforms like you don't deserve to live...

**Then he walked up to me and coldly stared in my eyes...**

Scyth: ... I'm gonna stuff a sock... With oranges... And I will beat your head with it over... And over... And over again... Until the oranges are nothing but pulp and juice...

Blain: ...

Scyth: Then I'll wring the sock and drink that juice... And I shall throw back my head and point and laugh at you... \*giggles\*

Blain: ... You've been sniffing glue again...?

***I knew Blain always had a pistol under his pillow... It's a habit he never got rid of ever since... So I slowly moved his head away as he was still asleep... Found it... I sat on the edge of the bed, holding the gun and stared at it... A really disturbing thought ran through my mind, now that I think of it, and I thought that it would be a cure... A medicine, if you will... So I checked to see if it was loaded... Gently pulled the safety off like Mahabi showed me once... But the gun was empty... I couldn't find any bullets... I checked everywhere... I sat for a long time on the bed, thinking of a way to end it... Then I suddenly found the answer...***

***I went to the weapons armory... I saw Blain entering once, and I knew the code and got hold of the keycard... And I saw all these weapons and ammo and bombs and everything... So I got out a round and placed it in the clip and cocked the pistol... Placed it in my mouth... And pulled the trigger... A loud bang was heard and my teeth tasted horrible as black smoke came out of my mouth... Then I looked at the box of the rounds... It said "Blanks"... Why the hell would they have blanks in the first place...? I continued to look around and found a grenade... And it even came with an instruction manual... Pull out the pin... Release the handle... Then I dropped the grenade... And waited for the bang... The bang came not long after that... A huge bang with a bright flash blinded me for a short while... As I looked at the manual again, I noticed it said "M3A4 Flashbang"... So I got out a different grenade and did the same... Another loud bang... I got hit by a lot of things and it hurt like hell, and I thought I was finally dieing... When I noticed I wasn't dead and looked around, I saw rubber balls all over the place... Turned out I detonated a stungrenade which shoots rubber balls... Heh, I said balls... Then I found a tazer gun, which shoots two darts on a wire while 50.000 volts is running through your body and it's deadly when you get hit near vital body parts... So I aimed at my head and pulled the trigger... Then I felt the two darts hitting my head... Is this what fifty thousand volts feel like on the flesh?! Nothing happened... Then I checked the gun and it said that the battery was empty... Gaaaah... Then I noticed in the far left corner an anti-tank missile... I checked the manual...***

***“Thank you for purchasing the M76A1 Javelin Anti-Tank missile. Please note that you need the docking station HUD in order for this missile to work. Chapter 1-A: Setting up your device. Place the launch tube over the docking station as shown in figure 1-A. Once the tube is connected to the docking station, check the connection status in HUD. If it says “Launch error nr. Usuxx0rz” the device is not properly connected. If the HUD says: “Launch Control: Code: Blowthosemotherfrackerstotinybits8D” You’re all set.***

***At that point, I knew enough. This had to work. I did everything the manual said... Then I placed the launch tube against my head because it didn’t fit in my mouth... I had the same problem with Blain’s di- Wait, getting sidetracked again... Focus, Nicole, focus... I gently activated the fire mechanism... I heard a bleep and when I checked the HUD, it said “Launch Error nr. 21.2X41: “Range too close. U suxorz”. Damn it!!! I took another pistol and saw it was loaded... Then I placed it in my mouth again... I was ready to pull the trigger until I felt a hand on my shoulders... When I turned around, I noticed it was Blain...***

Blain: Don’t... Please... You shouldn’t go like this...

Nicole: \*sobs\* I... I just can’t take it anymore Blain... I just can’t!

Blain: Yeah I know... Don’t put it in your mouth... Come on... Don’t do this...

***He grabbed my hand and moved it to the side of my head, so that the pistol would aim at my head...***

Blain: You should aim it to the side of you’re head... It’s way more effective that way! =3

Nicole: Damn it!!! I’m trying to commit suicide here!!

Blain: ... Oh...

Nicole: ...

Blain: ... Want me to help you with that...? =3

Nicole: GAAAAAAAAAH!!!

Blain: X3

Nicole: frack it, I’m going back to bed...

Blain: ... Be sure to wear those panties!! X3 \*gets punched\*

Scyth: Now I’ll just be another regular furry... \*sighs\*

Blain: ... I can’t believe it’s all over now...

Scyth: Well believe it...

Blain: ... What?

Scyth: ... Bliev it.

Blain: ...

Scyth: BLIEV IT!!! BLIEV IT!!!! BLIEV IT!!! BLIEV IT!!!! X3

Blain: The hell is wrong with yo-

Scyth: A NINJA LEGEND!!!!1 >\_<

Blain: ... O\_o

Blain: Alright... Get your gear and we’ll be moving out in 5 minutes... Jarod!! Front in center!!



**No response...**

Blain: Jarod!!!

Shifty: ... He's not here sarge...

Blain: Damn it!! Find him!! We need everyone!!

**And after that, Shifty ran off to find Jarod...**

Shifty: Jarod!! Where the hell are you?!!

***Shifty kept on calling Jarod but no response... At some point, he reached a door and he heard sounds, so he listened... He found out that Jarod was inside...***

Shifty: \*bangs on door\* Yo Jarod!! Get your things!! We'll be moving out in 5 minutes!!

***Again, no response... He put his ear against the door and listened to what was happening inside...***

Shifty: Yo Jarod!!! Open up!!! \*bangs on door\*

***After standing for more than ten minutes, he wasn't responding. So Shifty ran back to Blain...***

Blain: Where the hell is Jarod?!!

Shifty: Well, he was with Vilani. They both said they were coming but no one opened the door.

Blain: ... O\_o

Shifty: ...

Blain: ...

Shifty: ... Wait a sec...

**I helped her to get up from the ground by reaching out a hand after I got up... She took my hand and I pulled her up. She seemed so tired and weak, and walking seemed really difficult for her. I supported her as her arm went over my shoulders and I held her close... And so, we walked out of the sickbay... Together... Which was something I never thought I would ever do again... Just a simple thing like walking together... It felt so awkward yet I felt happy... We looked at each other once we were walking together and that's, I think, we both truly realized it... Sorrow, anger and misunderstandings got replaced by overwhelming happiness and love as we looked each other in the eyes... Then Nicole bumped into a pillar because she didn't look where she was going...**

***I took a good look at her face again and wiped the tears out of her eyes... And I just couldn't believe it... People I thought were dead came alive so all of a sudden... First Blain, then Amy... And if that wasn't enough, I noticed Blain was walking towards us, supporting someone else... And then I noticed that someone was Sonic... But there was something different about Sonic... I stood right in front of him and he wasn't even looking at me... But as I took a closer look, I noticed his***

**eyes were all mat and pale... Blain took Sonic's hands and guided them to my face... Then his hands drifted downward to my boobs... Sonic had a big grin on his face...**

Sonic: Oh Nicole, it's so good to feel you!! 8D \*gets punched\*

Shifty: TAZOR GUN!!!!!!1 X3

Jarod: HOLY shoot!!! O\_o

Shifty: \*fires tazor gun\*

Jarod: GAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!!!!1

Shifty: ...

Jarod: IS THIS WHAT 50.000 VOLTS LIKE FEEL ON THE FLESH?!!!

Shifty: ...

Jarod: \*rolls around on the ground\*

Shifty: ...

Jarod: \*spastic head movements\*

Shifty: Dude, it's not even charged...

Vilani: I-I'm gonna be a mommy...!

Jarod: ... You sure that it's not just a fart.....?

Vilani: ...

Rico: Sir, can I ask what the mission is?

Blain: Yeah, we're on a nunya mission.

Rico: Nunya mission sir?

Blain: Nunya damn business!! >\_<

Jarod: Hehehe, that never gets old...

Nicole: But Blain, I don't want you to go to war!!! I, I, I, I, I, I, I just can't. I won't!!! WEE-OOH, WEE-OOH!!!! Stay, stay and live, live a life with me. WEE-OOH!!!!1 Wee-Ohh Wee-Ohh Wee-Ohh-Wee!  
TT\_TT

Blain: Look Nicole, those curly things in your hair make me so hot, I can't think straight!!! >\_<

Shifty: Lot's corpses here...

Jarod: Yeah... Keep you're eyes open out here...

Shifty: ... Look.....

Jarod: What...?

Shifty: ...

Jarod: Don't turn that body around...!! It might be booby trapped...!!

Shifty: ...

Jarod: ...

Shifty: That's ok, I love boobies.

Jarod: ... Good point.

Rico: I eh... Well... The cybernetic engineer couldn't do much... He eh... Th-The chaos-drive inside of you is powering you're arm... But... It's also you're life-support... A-And the chaos-drive is damaged... It's draining... That's another reason of why we deactivated you're arm... You're arm will only drain it further down... So... So we deactivated you're arm to keep you alive for as long as possible...

Blain: ... So..... What you're saying is... I-is that I-I'm dieing...?

Rico: \*nods slowly\*

Nicole: \*gasps\*

Blain: ... I see... ..Ho-How much time...?

Rico: Six months... Maybe eight... Nine months tops... So... Seeing you're current state... It's... It's not recommended to go out on the field... No more field duty for you, sir...

Blain: \*nods slowly\*

Rico: I'm sorry to say this under these conditions..... I-I wish there w-was another way, b-but-

Blain: It's ok, Rico..... Thanks.....

Rico: I'm sorry... I truly am.....

Guy: ...

Blain: Who the hell are you?

Guy: Blain...

Blain: ... What?

Guy: Some things are just too important to take chances with. You can depend on Duracell to give you the power you need to get accurate readings and excellent performance from your home medical devices. So many sati- \*gets shot\*

All: ...

Energizer bunny: It just keeps going, and going, and goi- \*gets shot\*

All: ...

Blain: Scyth, we need you; we've got a situation, over.

Radio: \*kssht\* What's over? \*kssht\*

Blain: What I just said was over...

Radio: \*kssht\* Ten four. \*kssht\*

Blain: It's not ten passed four, it's only eleven o'clock!

Radio: \*kssht\* Oh. Roger that. \*kssht\*

Blain: Who the hell is Roger?

Radio: \*kssht\* I don't know... \*kssht\*

Blain: Copy that.

Radio: \*kssht\* What's to copy? \*kssht\*

Blain: That you said Roger.

Radio: \*kssht\* Who's Roger? \*kssht\*

Blain: I don't know, you said Roger!!

Roger: Roger here! ^-^

Blain: ..... \*kicks Roger\*

**\*ahem\***

**Anyway, on to the after word thingies...**

**Afterword stuff**

Unlike the Deus Ex Machina story, this one is not focused anymore on actual warfare. Its main focus is about love, trust, friendship and survival in an almost impossible doomsday scenario. It's kinda interesting to see how Nicole and Blain evolved over the stories regarding their personalities. In particular, Nicole's character. In the beginning where she first made her appearance, she was cocky and arrogant, but that slowly changed into the opposite. She changed even more when she thought that Blain died. I guess that's some sort of an interesting perspective, because sadly, the only thing that unifies people is wars...

Well, what's more to say... Hm... I don't really know. As you may have guessed it, this'll be my last big story. I might do some randomness things when ideas pop in, but that's pretty much it.

Oh dear lord, here it comes again. \*ahem\* Again, I feel kinda sad that it's over again, because I had a lot of fun writing the last story as well... I think it was even more fun then the previous two stories together...

I wanted to thank everyone who's been following this story since the beginning, and especially the ones who left me nice comments. I hopes you enjoyed the story as much as I loved writing it ( How corny is that, it's the third time I write that in an afterword thing ) and it would be deeply appreciated if you tell me your honest opinion about the whole stories. Critics are of course welcome and I wouldn't mind if you tell me what you didn't liked about the story. =3

So eh... I guess that's it... I'm getting really hungry right now... Must pillage the refrigerator... >=3

Boooya!! See ya around!!

MrGimp