In Perfect Harmony

by MjrGenMatt, Precursor

Summary

Liera, Jack, and the rest of Planet Harmony’s inhabitants must learn how to coexist with their newest resident:

A Remnant Architect named Tiny.

[A collection of one shots]

Notes

To keep things interesting, neither of us tell each other how our chapters will end. You will see us commenting on each other's chapters because of this.

- Inspired by Of Steel and Stardust by Precursor
Building a Better War

Chapter Summary

Facing overwhelming odds alone, Jack and BT were sure to fall. It'd take a miracle to save them... or a really big robot.

Chapter Notes

So this is my (MjrGenMatt) first ever attempt at writing fanfiction. I got the idea for this story after reading 'Of Steel and Stardust' and getting to know Precursor. She gave me the push I needed to give it a shot, so thanks to her for making this thing happen, and for letting me use her OCs. You'll notice differences in style and formatting, bear with me.

Anyway, this is the pilot chapter for the series. I hope you enjoy, all the best!

Chapter by MjrGenMatt

Several times in my life I’ve wondered how I got to a particular point. When I learned that my real mother and father weren’t the ones raising me, when I finally got to third base with my high school girlfriend, Taylor something I don’t remember, when I first became an acting Pilot after dad died…

And now, stuck in what looks to be my final fight against way too many goddamned Titans…

Seriously, how many do they have to send at us?! It seemed that no matter how many BT and I doomed, there was two more to replace the first. This was an honest to God no-win situation. BT’s shield was long burnt out, we had structural damage all over the fucking place, and I’m pretty sure there’s a spider crawling on my shoulder right n- Yep, there definitely is. Stuck in the middle of some fucking ravine with hundred foot walls, can only go forward or back, fighting for my life…

How did I get here?

I’m not a praying man, but in this instance I couldn’t help but wonder what awaited me on the other side, and counting all the things I’d probably never see again. My house on Harmony, our dog, the guys back home, my pain-in-the-ass sister Liera…Man, I really fucked up this time. Told her the IMC wasn’t about to get me, that I’d be fighting by her side again soon enough. If I die
Another explosion rocked the hull, and I snapped out of my daze. Now wasn’t the time to give up, BT was still counting on me to take this as far as we could. I reloaded the Predator Cannon and set it to long range mode.

The gun shield flickered to life as the Smart Core spun up, ripping the quickly closing Reapers to pieces and causing the nearby Ion Titan to go up in flames. Another down, only six hundred more to go.... I knew the situation was bleak, but it hit me again just how fucked we were. Figured I almost might as well pack it in, when BT’s robotic voice sounded out with the best news I’d heard all day.

“Pilot, we have friendly reinforcements inbound.”

“BT unless it’s like seventy more Titans, and right fucking now, it’s not gonna matter!”

The thought nearly died in my throat as the ground shook as if the planet itself was cracking in half. The nearest Nuke Titan disappeared into the ground, swallowed by some unknown force. All was quiet for several moments, as none of the combatants knew what had just happened. The ground trembled again, and I could see the look of pure fear as an enemy pilot stared into BT’s cockpit with a look devoid of all hope. He too was gone, in the blink of an eye.

My mind became a whirlwind as hell itself seemingly sprung forth from the earth, engulfing three more Titans and forcing the remaining hostiles into a hasty retreat. The creature, whatever it was, was an all black snake-like thing that had appendages coming from a head of sorts, and inside that head was a core that looked very much like the reactor in a Titan. Its whole body looked to be covered in super-hardened armor - it seemed like even Titan weapons were worthless against it. If BT could’ve smiled, this would have been the time.

“Better than that, Pilot.”

“BT are you sure that thing is on our side?!?”

Liera’s cocky voice was the first one I picked out after the ringing in my ears ceased, right after her airy laugh.

“What, Jack, did you think I’d just let you die? Get real, what’d I say about letting these dickheads kill you?! I need you to live now so I can kill you myself later!”

I’ve never been so happy to hear a threat against my life.

“Was wondering when you were gonna show up, kid. These schmucks caught me in the middle of helping an old lady cross the street, would you believe it?”

“Shocker. Let’s teach these fuckers a lesson!”

“So sis, where’d you get the uhh… Giant murder robot? The one not named EV?”

“Murder now, talk later! EV, flame core!”

EV’s robotic female voice sounded out.
“Engaging hostile Titans. Hello, BT-7274, Pilot Cooper.”

BT responded in kind.

“Greetings, EV-5649, Pilot Lastimosa.”

“Great to see you, EV! Let’s kick some ass!”

The giant murder robot let out an ear-shattering roar and continued its rampage, gliding through the air - Liera had some real explaining to do - and swatting another two Titans with its monstrous frame. It set itself down on its three… tendrils? Yeah, sure. Set itself down and fired what I could only describe as a concentrated ray of death and fuck-you at a cluster of grunts and Stalkers, more or less obliterating them instantly.

Mental note to not make Liera mad enough at me to warrant using this thing.

BT charged forward, shoulder checking a Scorch and knocking it to the ground, where he stuffed the Predator Cannon in the Titan’s cockpit and fired for a few uninterrupted seconds. Satisfied that it was dead enough, I looked up and saw EV smashing the hell out of a Titan, ending its life.

The giant murder robot fired several explosive charges at a line of Titans, dooming them or otherwise rendering them incapacitated. Each of us went from one target to the next, picking off each enemy with ruthless precision. Not wanting to get too complacent, I set off for the next Titan. The Ronin I found charged at me, blade drawn. In a burst of nothing but adrenaline and possibly misplaced courage, I slid under the blade as it made a sweeping cut, punched out the legs, and dropped an elbow into the cockpit.

A Reaper jumped on BT’s back, firing close range shots into him, so I quickly rolled hard on the ground. Luckily this was enough to dislodge the damn thing, so I grabbed it by the torso and legs and literally ripped it in half.

Discarding the remains, I looked around again. I saw EV in the distance picking up a doomed Titan and tossing it into the air, only for it to be intercepted by the murder bot, which hit it with a focused laser and sent it careening into a cliff and exploding. I could hear Liera growl at that, and EV moved to dispatch several Reapers, snatching them right off the ground and throwing them like baseballs.

Liera yelled into the comm, “Batter up!”

The murder bot came back around and smashed each Reaper with its tendrils, sending them to pieces immediately upon contact. I smiled and shook my head at Liera’s antics, always the drama queen.

“Pilot, recommend you focus on the remaining hostiles.”

BT’s warning caused me to shake my head once again. I glanced back at the field in front of me. Still not out of the woods, gotta keep focused.

“Hey Liera, toss me one!”

Without missing a beat EV threw a hapless Reaper in our direction. I loaded up the power
shot, took aim, and fired, destroying the damn thing mid-air.

“Whoo, hot damn! Thanks sis!”

I saw EV flash a thumbs up, before curling the same hand into a fist, swiveling around, and belting a Northstar Titan in the face. I caught sight of another Scorch heading our way, so I switched the Predator Cannon back to close range mode and began laying into it. It sent its Firewall at me, hitting BT in the shoulder bracing the gun. BT stumbled, nearly losing his balance.

“Pilot, significant structural damage sustained. We must end this now.”

“Roger that buddy, let’s waste this fucker!”

I used BT’s dashes to quickly close the gap, using large rocks as cover. Once we were maybe fifty feet away, it launched a shot from the Thermite Launcher right at us. With a surprising amount of agility, and probably some dumb luck, we were able to sidestep just enough to watch the column of fire sail past us, seemingly in slow motion, missing us by mere inches. We looked back at the Scorch, letting it know they were fucked. The enemy Titan frantically tried to reload as BT charged again, Predator Cannon at the ready. Using the Cannon, he flipped the Scorch up into the air, impaled the Titan on the barrel, and fired until the magazine was empty. When the ammo count ran dry, BT threw what was left to the side.

“You sons of bitches started this, we’re gonna end it! Which one of you bastards is next?!?”

After several minutes of carnage that even dad would be proud of, everything was more or less over. BT finished ripping the battery out of the last Titan, as I caught sight of EV stomping out the last foot soldier. I was breathing very heavily, sucking in air by the bunch. I could her Liera doing the same over the comm. The murder bot landed with another giant thud, shaking everything around it. Maybe twenty feet from me, it was easily the single most imposing looking creature I’d ever seen at a few hundred feet tall. It eyed me down, electricity rolling off its body all the while. Each of the links of its body seemed to move and reset, making it seem even more terrifying somehow. Liera got my attention with her bombastic yelling.

“Yeah baby! That’s what I’m talking about! Been a while since I’ve gotten that excited during a fight. How about you, Jack, was it as good for you as it was for me?”

“You’re hilarious. Now, what uhh…what the hell is that?”

“Called an Architect. You like?”

“So long as it doesn’t decide I’m on the menu, yeah I suppose. You got a name for it?”

“Not just yet, but I’m thinking Tiny.”

“Somehow I’m not surprised. It’s acting like your pet or something, what’s the deal with that?”

“Long story short I can control it with a mental link not unlike how we use our Titans. There’s a lot of science bullshit besides that, which I don’t really understand, so don’t ask.”

“But how does your brain not explode from all the mental stimuli? Just pairing with a Titan takes some serious juice! I can’t imagine what kind of supercomputer you’d need to control that thing.”
“What did I just say, Jack?”

“...Noted. So where’d it come from?”

“Found it.”

“...That’s it?”

“Yup. Come on, let’s get out of here.”

She punctuated the statement by walking away, signaling for me to follow. I shrugged, figured it probably wasn’t worth the effort to pull the whole story out of her, and accepted the fact that I was just saved from a fucked situation in miracle fashion by my kid sister and her new world eater. Just another day, right? I jogged a bit to catch up to her.

“So, what’re we doing tomorrow?”
Chapter Summary

Jack asked her what they were doing tomorrow...
Liera wasn't sure if Commander Briggs would let them live to see it.

Chapter by Precursor

If you’ve ever seen a hospital’s emergency room during an epidemic, you’d already know what a Militia Titan Bay looks like after a major conflict with the IMC. If not, well…The best way to describe it is:

Complete and utter chaos.
To make matters worse?
There was a giant robot following us home, floating in outer space right alongside the MCS Braxton.
“Pilot-“
“I know, EV. I see it.”

No, I hadn’t thought about what came after I neural-linked with the so-called “Architect” EV and I found underneath ruins that didn’t exist outside of classified SRS reports. And no, I shouldn’t have gone to check out the strange frequencies we picked up without asking permission, or on my own…

And none of that mattered now. All that did was that there was a robot half the size of the ship following us through each slipstream jump we took.

I sighed, and pulled my helmet off. EV’s cockpit doors opened, and our designated mechanic waited for me to disembark before handing me a clipboard.

“Here’s the damage, Pilot.”
I gave him an acknowledging grunt, flipping through the report.

Severe damage to the hull. Burnt sparkplugs. A jammed acolyte pod launcher. Sensory
malfunctions on the rear optical panel. Near complete depletion of ammunition reserves.

I stopped reading halfway, and turned to EV as she put her face back together. The
cockpit doors locked tight, her innocent little lens blinking.

She was scratched to all hell, the nose art I ordered to be painted reduced to a mess of
dents and what used to be feathers.

“I’ll give you 50 Credits under the table if you fix her paint job.”

“Uh…” He looked around at the sparking, twitching Titans that began unloading their own Pilots,
“You do realize we’re understaffed with more emergency operations scheduled than we’ve had
since Typhon, right?”

Some of his metal patients were missing limbs, others were…set on fire…and-
Shit.
MOB-1316 had parked. His Pilot?
Commander Sarah fucking Briggs.

I shoved the clipboard at his chest, and jumped the railing. I’d just landed and began to
hightail it to my Quarters before I heard a terrorizing shout.

“LASTIMOSA!”

I froze, spun on my heel, and gave her the sturdiest salute I have in years.
She pushed herself to her feet, not having waited for her own cockpit to open entirely
before jumping out. She ripped her helmet off, and stormed towards me.

Yeah.

Shit.

My hand began to shake, the edge of my palm trembling above my brow.

“What were you…What is—” Her lips curled, “Just WHAT?!”

I gulped, and folded my hands behind my back.

“Commander, I—"

The hatch at the end of the Bay peeled open, and a limping BT shoved another Titan out
of his way before continuing his walk of shame. No, that’s a bad word for it. More like his walk
of, “I’m still here, mother fuckers.”

Sarah snapped her fingers in front of my face, “Hey, HEY. I asked you a question,
Pilot!”

I swallowed again, and shifted my frightened eyes to her.

“I’ll have an official report to you by this evening.”

Her gloves squealed as her hands imploded into fists.

“I want it on my desk within the hour. Do not make me hunt you down.”

Her shoulder hit mine as she stomped past me, strong enough to dislodge my prosthetic
arm from its stiff salute.

My lungs drained the breath they held captive. I closed my eyes, trying to reel in the fear
of being pummeled, but honestly, I would have preferred to be out there wrangling that thing I
found rather than pissing off the Commander.

“Hey.”

My eyes snapped open, and my brother was the one talking, now.

“Hi.”

He gave me that stupid sideways grin he’s had since he was a kid.

“You never answered my question.”

I bit my lip, and tried not to yell. Tried not to ream him for the “I want to be a hero
again,” shit he and BT pulled out there. The kind of shit that forced my hand in riding a goddamn
murder machine in the sky so it could get its fill of IMC Titans.

Still, he was alive. I held on to that, and let him off easy.

“What question, Jack…” I sighed.

My shoulders tensed to my ears as another shout came from behind me.

“COOPER!”

He broke into the same, panicked salute I had a moment ago.
“Yes, sir, COMMANDER BRIGGS, SIR?”

I inched around him. She was standing there, neck arched over her shoulder.

“Eye-witness statement. FOURTY. FIVE. MINUTES.” She shouted, and took a sharp turn towards the Command Deck.

He squinted at me, “This is your fault.”

I shrugged, “Worth it.”

Sarah had one hand tucked under her arm, holding Jack’s written statement in the other.

Her brows slowly pinched in the middle as her eyes darted from the first sentence to the last.

When we finally made it back to Harmony, Jack and I rushed to our terminals. Writing a full-on report like that in 10 minutes did neither of our stories justice, and she made us stand at full attention while she read them.

She stood behind her desk, staring us down. She adjusted herself, leaning the small of her back on a filing cabinet.

She was not a happy Commander.

“Giant murder robot?” Sarah glared at Jack.

He cleared his throat, “Yes, sir.”

She shifted her death-glare to me, and pinched the bridge of her nose.

“So it’s actually called an Architect?”

“Yes, sir.” I answered.

Sarah took a deep breath before sitting down, folding her hands and placing them on her desk.

“Take a seat.”

Jack and I sat in a quick, simultaneous motion.

“Lastimosa, your report says you evaluated all available options before linking with…’Tiny’…and then woke it up. Cooper’s report suggests otherwise, and I quote,” She pulled Jack’s snitch-report closer to her face, “I can control it with a mental link not unlike how we use our Titans. There’s a lot of science bullshit besides that, which I don’t really understand, so don’t ask.’ Which is it?”

“He said what?” I reached out, trying to snatch it from her hands.

Jack grabbed my arms, aiming them away.

“You-“ He started to defend himself, but my shoulder bumped his mouth, interrupting him, “YOU SAID IT, NOT ME!”

“PILOTS!” Sarah slapped the report on the desk like a newspaper on a dog’s behind.

My back hit my chair, and so did Jack’s.

“Need I remind you that every Pilot in the Marauder Corps is liable for severe charges should they intentionally compromise themselves or their Titan’s neural-link.” She folded her arms, and crossed her legs, “I’ve got half a mind to lock you in the brig.”

“I didn’t-“

She raised a hand, “I’m not done.”

I shut my mouth, and let her keep berating me.

“The refugees in Newdrift are panicking. The Architect parked right next to them after we got the Braxton in drydock.” She ran a hand down her face, “Every time it…purrs…the ground shakes. We’ve been getting complaints from the colonies outside the city. So, oh wise Lastimosa, where do you propose we even put this thing?”

I was ready to suggest the biggest moon we could find in the Freeport System, but the radio strapped to her vest crackled before I got a word out.

The electricity flickered, and the whole building trembled.

“Commander!”

Her face turned red. She shook her head slowly with daggers for eyes, “I swear, if this...
has anything to do with your new pet…”

A heavy sigh left her, and she clicked the button on the side of the radio, “What’s up, Bish?”

“This…this—“

“Giant murder robot…“ Jack mumbled.

“Whatever this is, just started burrowing on the Outskirts!”

Sarah bit her lip. The edge of Jack’s report crinkled in her fist.

“Hang tight.”

She flattened her hands on the desk, and pushed herself out of her chair.

“This is your mess. Fix it.” Her lips twitched in anger as she spoke.

I nodded so quickly I made myself dizzy, “Yes, Commander. What are my orders?”

“Put together a Fireteam, get out there, and get that fucking thing out of here.”

I pursed my lips, “Or…”

Her nose scrunched, “‘OR?’”

“We could…you know, just let it do it’s thing. Build stuff.”

She slammed her fists on the desk, sending a pencil holder to the floor. Jack and I jumped in our seats.

“Unless it can build us a better war, I don’t want any ‘stuff,’ it has to offer! Now MOVE IT!”

I almost knocked the chair over as I jumped to my feet. I’d just got my hand on the door handle before she barked again.

“And Lastimosa…”

I cocked my chin towards her.

“The next time you slam my door, you’ll find yourself with two prosthetic arms. Are we clear?”

I nodded.

“Good. Dismissed.”

Jack and I escaped the Commander’s office, and I put my hands on my stomach. Delta Wing rumbled again, and an alarm went blaring overhead.

“I think I’m gonna be sick.” I raised a fist to my mouth.

“No time for that. You’ve gotta take Tiny for a walk.”

I gave him the most condescending look I could muster, “If you think you’re getting out of this, you’re even more stupid than you were when you thought taking on half the IMC’s fleet on your own was a good idea.”

“Great…”

I stretched my back, and hiked a brow, “Oh, and what question didn’t I answer? The one from before.”

He blinked himself awake, “I asked you, ‘What’re we doing tomorrow…?’”

“HAH!” I slapped him on the back, and flipped my helmet over my head.

My visor lit up, and more warnings than I could keep track of littered my HUD.

“We gotta make it to tomorrow, Jack.”
Remembering What Was

Chapter Summary

All things considered, Jack and Liera lead pretty alright lives. They weren’t dead, and that was more than some could say.

Chapter by MjrGenMatt

“Look all I’m saying is there’s no way that a fucking blimp could work in today’s wars.”

“Say what you want, Jack, they made it work.”

“You and your games, I swear…”

“Better than the shit you play when you think no one’s in your room…”

“How did you-“

“Moving on.”

“Lily has such a rich backstory, and-“

“MOVING ON, Jack.”

I sighed and dropped it, knowing that she held all the cards here. Best to just let it go before I dig a hole big enough for Tiny to fit in.
Liera and I were on our way to visit a friend, figured it’d be a nice gesture since we hadn’t seen him in a while. We found ourselves in the city, walking through the park in the center. It was fairly cold today, with a slight breeze on top of the lower temperatures. No sun, but no rain either. You know, your typical November weather. We never were ones for the cold...

“You remember when *that little shit* ‘accidentally’ shouldered you into the lockers and you just about smashed his teeth in on the spot? Told him you’d beat the stuffing out of him if he kept bugging you?”

Liera giggled, a sound I didn’t hear from her all that often. “Yeah, and do *you* remember when you *did* beat the stuffing out of him because he “accidentally” pushed me down the stairs and broke my arm?”

“I’d do it again. I was so mad.”

“Heh, it’s alright. Joke’s on him, I ended up with a sweet prosthetic to replace that arm.”

I chuckled. “Suppose so. What do you think he’s doing nowadays?”

“Unless he’s stuck between the toes of one of the Titans back there in the mechanic bay, I honestly do not care.”

“Preach.”

We were at the edge of the pond now, slowing a bit to see our vivid reflections in the clear water. I had my tan sport coat halfway fastened, sis had her long black coat buttoned all the way up. Characteristically, she had her aviators on. Uncharacteristically, she had a pink scarf covering her neck. Looking at her face, I could see it cloud over a bit.

I chuckled a bit again at the sight.

“Shut up.”

“You don’t even know what I was laughing about, sis.”

“Doesn’t matter, bitch boy.”

“You know I’m funny.”

“Funny looking, maybe.”

“And that’s why you love me so much!”

“Not loving your bullshit at the moment.”

Didn’t have an answer for that, so I just kept walking. We passed under a foot bridge as I let out a deep sigh. Liera sometimes got in these moods when a lot was on her mind, and I’d learned long ago that it was best to just leave her be until she found a way around whatever was occupying her thoughts. Being there for her in the meantime was what I’d found worked best.

“You know that I love you, right?”

She stopped as she said this, so I did as well and turned to look at her. She had tears running down her face, and her cheeks were a slight red. My face must have clearly shown how confused I was by this proclamation, because she continued.
“You know I don’t mean it when I say things like that, right? I love you Jack, and I appreciate the things you do. For me, for the Militia…”

“Not that I don’t appreciate it, Liera, but what brought this on?”

Several seconds of silence followed, as I watched Liera stare at me, then the ground. I looked to my right and saw a bench there, so I gently took her arm and guided her over to it. We sat down and I let Liera get the tears out while rubbing her back. I didn’t say anything else, and waited patiently. After a minute or two she seemed to have more or less pulled herself together.

“It’s just… Sometimes the reality of things hits me, and my first thought to cope with it is to lash out at anyone nearby.”

She didn’t seem to plan to elaborate so I took a chance and asked myself.

“Anything you wanna talk about?”

“I’ve just been thinking about all the people that I’ve lost… dad, mom, most of my friends from Basic… Ryan…”

Her voice hitched as she said the last name, and her eyes went downwards once again as fresh tears found their way to the surface.

“Whether it’s from the IMC or some freak accident, I’ve lost so much. You have too. If I were to lose you by driving you away because I was being a bitch? I don’t know what I’d do…”

As soon as she said this I took her by the shoulders and lightly shook her.

“Hey, don’t talk like that. Liera, listen to me. We’ve gone through so much in our lives. Going through the Academy, a bunch of ops together, losing mom and dad-“ My own voice cracked. “-Point is, I’d never leave you. For any reason. You and me are in this together, and we’re gonna blitz the hell out of whatever life throws at us and make it through to the other side with a whiskey in one hand and a cigar in the other. I love you, sis. Don’t ever forget that.”

At some point during my soapbox rant she stopped crying and was looking right at me. She sniffed, and took me into a tight hug. We stayed like that for a while, don’t know how long. Eventually she pulled away and looked at me again, swiping at any remaining tears.

“Thanks, Coop. Don’t know how I’d survive without you.”

I smiled. “Luckily you won’t ever have to figure it out.”

We stayed on the bench for a few more minutes. Some of it in comfortable silence, some of it talking about whatever tiny thing came to mind.

“…And then he ends it off by saying ‘War never changes’ with the full orchestra in the background.”

“Okay I’ll admit, the whole concept does sound really awesome.”

“It is, plus there’s this super hot guy in it that just has the best voice and I could just-“

“Alright alright.”

“I mean really I’d do the most naughty things-“
“Liera I think I get the ide-“
“I would fuck his voice.”

…
“I don’t know what I expected.”
“I don’t either, Coop.”

We stared at each other in total silence for a few seconds, and then burst into fits of hysterics over how silly the whole conversation was.

“You wanna keep going?”

She silently nodded, so we stood up and resumed our walk. We were nearly there, just a few more blocks. When we got there, the place looked just as pristine as always, with flowers and a well-kept lawn out front. I opened the door for Liera, and she walked through. After a minute or so we reached our destination.

A headstone reading “Ryan Royal.”

I turned my head to look at Liera, and saw the most stoic face she could pull, eyes boring into the nameplate. I patted her on the shoulder.

“Take all the time you need, I’ll be by the tree.”

She nodded again and moved closer to the stone. I watched her go, hands clasped in front of her, and walked to the tree off to the side. I rested my back against it and looked up. It wasn’t often that Liera wanted to take time to come visit Ryan, but when she did I always made sure I was available to come with her. She always asked why I did it, and I always dodged the question. Truth was, the few times I met Ryan I wasn’t impressed. Me and him never quite saw eye to eye, but we put on good faces for Liera’s sake. Wasn’t often a guy could make my sister feel like she was the best thing in the universe, so I did what I had to to avoid making things difficult.

My mind wandered for a few more minutes, when I heard crunching leaves and looked to see Liera slowly walking back towards me. She cocked her chin back towards the cemetery entrance, and I shook my head.

“Give me a minute sis, got some words to say.”

She held the most confused look on her face.

“Did Tiny smack you in the head or something? Does Talon need to sit you down in the medbay? Should I take you to a hospital?”

I laughed at her.

“Listen, I just want to say a few things and then we can leave. Five minutes.”

She waved her hand at me, signaling that I had her permission to go.

With my hands in my pockets I started over towards Royal’s headstone. Arriving at the grave, I spent a few seconds staring, trying to figure out just what to say. It’s weird, I just had the thoughts queued up before I came over here…
“Hey Royal, long time no talk. I uhh… I wanted to come with Liera today to say a few things. I know you and me didn’t get along, like, ever. But… ah hell, I’ll just say it. I wanted to thank you. Thank you for being an honest to god hero for the Militia. For being everything that Liera wanted and needed, even if it wasn’t for very long. Thank you for saving her life, for giving her back to me and everyone else… I don’t know what I’d do without her. Heh, it’s funny. She just said the same thing to me on our way over here. Truth is, we need each other. So, thank you for allowing us to stay as a family. To keep going. We won’t forget you buddy, or anything you’ve done.” I took a deep breath. “We may fight with steel, but we do not rust. For we are vessels, forged from stardust. Thus when you die, and your blood runs dry. To the heavens we’ll aim, our freedom cry.”

With that, I patted the top of the headstone and walked back to my sister.

“Good talk, Coop?”

“Yeah… yeah you could say that. I think me n’ Royal understand each other now.”

“Not even gonna ask.”

“It’s OK kid, I said nice things.”

Liera punched my shoulder, thankfully not with her prosthetic.

“Thanks for today, Jack.”

“Any time, sis. Any time.”

Making it to tomorrow wasn’t something one could take for granted when the IMC was involved. There were no guarantees, so we had to take what we could get sometimes. This time, I got to properly thank the man that allowed my sister, and by extension me, to make it to tomorrow. As we were walking back, a thought struck me.

“Liera, did you uhh… did you remember to chain up Tiny like Briggs asked?”

She looked over at me, eyes half lidded and voice thick with condescendence.

“Of fucking course I did, Jack, why would you think-“

The voice of the harbinger of death herself boomed over our comm units.

“LASTIMOSA! COOPER! Get your sorry asses back here now!”

We looked at each other, and Liera pinched the bridge of her nose.

“All I asked him to do was not blow shit up and cause a panic.”

“Told ya you should’ve walked him more.”

I shot a half smile at her, and she punched me again. This time with the metal arm.

“Come on dummy, we’ve got a giant murder robot to wrangle.”

Rubbing my probably dislocated shoulder, I sighed.

“I get the feeling our lives now will always be a series of ‘making it to tomorrows.’ Never a dull moment…”
Ryder Die

Chapter Summary

Tiny may have gone to sleep, but he was scared.
What could scare an Architect?

Chapter by Precursor

I didn’t need dad to be alive to hear him screaming, “YOU HAD ONE JOB.”
His reprimand was loud and clear as I stood on the outskirts of Radiance, the capital city of Planet Harmony that housed the HQ of the Frontier Militia…
And my “one job” was to secure Tiny and making sure he didn’t act up.
I turned to EV, watching from behind.
“All clear, Commander.”
“Copy that.  Keep me posted.”
“Yes, sir.”
Tiny preferred to be petted with my prosthetic, and the scraping of metal-on-metal ground against my eardrums.
“Shhh…” I mumbled, my hand sliding down the tip of his enormous…Beak?
“It’s alright.”
I rolled my eyes, wondering how I got myself into this mess.
Oh. Right. I’d been an idiot.  An impulsive idiot.  The worst kind.
“Pilot,” EV chirped, “I believe the Architect is scared.”
“I cocked my chin, “You feel that, too?”
“Yes.”
Being neural-linked with a Vanguard-class Titan came with its own complexity of human-to-robot-and-vice-versa transference of emotions. After throwing an Architect in the mix, things were getting out of hand.
Complicated.
Kind of like how this thing had emotions.
It begged the questions: How was it even possible that another sentient, non-organic lifeform existed? One that couldn’t speak, on top of it all? Where did it come from?
I sighed, and plopped on the ground. I flicked my canteen open, taking a few gulps of water before wiping my mouth and draping my elbows over my knees.
“Jack, you there?”
“Sure am. Still not coming anywhere near that thing.”
I looked over my shoulder, finding BT’s twinkling chassis out in the distance.
“Punk.”
“That’s okay. I’m perfectly fine with being a ‘punk,’ so long as Tiny knows to respect my personal space.”
A dust devil twirled towards the sky, spinning out as it climbed higher. Tiny nestled in
the sand, pushing it up and forming dunes around his massive head.

Another question came to mind:

What could scare an Architect?


The Militia had its hands full repairing the 9th Militia Fleet after we made it home. Ship hulls, Titan frames – you name it. If it was made out of metal, it needed fixed.

Problem was, we couldn’t fix loss of life. Our forces had been thinned, and those hands we needed so badly were in short supply.

What better time to be an engineer…

I jumped on my bed, burying my face in a pillow. I’d just finished a 12-hour shift, and had a long week of being on-call ahead of me. That meant two things:

I got my own room in on-base housing…And my “shift,” wasn’t actually over.

“EV, set an alarm for 0600…” I yawned at my helmet on the night stand, cursing the clock for striking zero-hundred.

“Alarm set. Good night, Pilot Lastimosa.”

“Night, EV.”

I pulled my blanket tight against my body, ready to drift off into sweet dreams of kittens and hopefully not nightmares.

I didn’t get very far.


Even after the Scourge hit, I remained patient. When these so-called humans began activating the Monoliths, I stayed quiet. Despite them wandering into the Vault and wiping it out, I held my position.

Then they brought machines with them. Built a home. Put devices down that shook Eos to the core just for a few drops of water.

They were defiling my creation, and I decided that I’d laid idle long enough.

“Last hammer. Everyone ready?”

I listened from below, waiting to make my move. I’d set the trap, and they’d taken the bait. Their faces as my tendrils reached towards the sky were priceless.

Never have I encountered such a species that knew so little about the technology they toyed with. They were overdue for a hard lesson.

“What is that?!”

“Coming this way!”

I thought the fight would be easy…But no matter how many Remnant spawns I delivered, they were cut down.

I fled. More than once. They followed. It wasn’t until I made it to orbit that they left me alone.

And so, the search for a new home began…because the one I spent centuries designing had fallen to their hands.

His hands.

He who teleported and shot pure, raw energy from his palms. He who had reverse-
engineered an Observer to abide by his commands, forcing it to reveal my weaknesses. He who cut my army down with waves of concentrated power that even I hadn’t witnessed. *He who they called, “Pathfinder.”*

…

I shot upright, dripping in cold sweat. I’d barely caught my breath before I realized the series of chirps weren’t EV’s alarm clock.

“Pilot, the robot construct designated as ‘Tiny,’ is in distress.”

My fingers slid across my eyes as I tried to rub the tired out. I blinked rapidly, turning to check the time.

0200. Two hours of sleep was enough for a Pilot to be fully-functional, right?

“I recommend we aid and assist. If he repeats previous behavior, Commander Briggs may grow irate.”

I sighed.

She wasn’t wrong. The timing didn’t sit well with me after having the dream I did, though.

*Tiny’s dream…*

It was as if this was his way of talking to me.

“Did you see what I saw?”

“I witnessed a strong series of fluctuations within the patterns of your brain waves. I was not, however, able to see what was causing them.”

I swallowed, thinking back to the man in black. He had some watered-down version of a jump kit built into a suit unlike anything I’d ever seen. An orange blade that glowed on this left arm. A gun that resembled a Smart Pistol. He wasn’t wearing a Pilot’s helmet, but the one he did wear sure as fuck wasn’t standard-issued. And his…abilities.

Spawning a shield, seemingly out of nowhere. Disappearing in a purple blur before charging at an enemy, blasting them with a surge of…*something.*

I realized Tiny’s fear was far from misguided. The “Pathfinder” scared me, too.

And that was pretty damn hard to do.

…

Get to Commander Briggs before Tiny wakes all of Radiance up.

It’s all I could focus on.

I hopped on one leg, trying to put my left boot on while I all but ran down the hall of Delta Wing. My jumpsuit wasn’t zipped up the whole way. The Velcro straps of my armor were crooked and kept sticking to my shemagh. The chain that held my dogtags got tangled in my hair – the side that wasn’t shaved.

I was the literal definition of a mess.

“Long night?”

I froze, my side hitting the wall as I lost balance.

Jack was in his fatigues, judging me as he rested his elbow on top of the helmet strapped to his belt.

“I wish.” I huffed, pausing to lace my boot.
“Who’s the guy?” He put his hands on his hips, “Who do I have to murder?”
“Not that…” I rolled my eyes, “Tiny needs me.”
“Uh…How would you know?”
I pointed to the silver implants in my head.
“I don’t envy you.”
I jogged past him, ignoring his comment.
“Want some back up?”
“What, so you can hide out on the hill again?” I stopped, “What are you doing up, anyway?”
He took to the face he made when he tried to come up with a lie. His jaw tightened crooked, his cheeks got red, and he crossed his arms, “Couldn’t sleep.”
“Uh-huh…So you were with Sage again.”
He clammed up.
“Right. Well, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got to break EV out of the Titan Bay without getting caught.”
“I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”
“Why? I’ve done it plenty of times.”
“MOB and BT are parked right next to her. I saw them before I packed up and went home.”
“Ugh…”
I wasn’t worried about BT outing me. MOB, on the other hand…
“Sorry, girl…You’re gonna have to sit this one out.”
My helmet blinked, “Pilot, the maintenance frames have my chassis stuck in a standing position. Adjusting myself may cause damage to Militia property. How do you wish to proceed?”
I shook my head, “Just stay put…”
“Leaving you to visit ‘Tiny’ by yourself seems to be a direct violation of Protocol 3.”
“He’s not gonna hurt me, EV.”
“Evaluating risk assessment…Pilot, results conclude that fatality may incur by the following methods:
Getting stepped on.
Incinerated by a laser.
Ripped in hal-“
“EV.” I snapped, “I’ll be fine.”
She quieted, but I could feel her doubt.
Should’ve listened.

…

The sandy outskirts of Radiance weren’t hot like they’d been earlier in the day. There was a soothing chill on the breeze that carried a sweet scent. If Tiny could smell, he might’ve liked it.

Maybe it would’ve settled him down.
“What’s gotten into you?”
My Hemlok rattled against my leg as I held my hands up, trying to direct his pointed spear-for-a-face back at my direction. The three triangles that formed his mouth opened, and a red light flashed and faded in sync with his pitiful chirps.
He kept looking behind him.
“Is someone out there?”
I launched the HUD on my visor.
“Commencing typography scan…” EV announced as an orange line swept the desert, “Pilot, there is an unidentified aircraft with stealth technology stationed 3 klicks from your current location.”
I squinted, seeing the faintest shape blinking on the horizon. EV zoomed in. We’d almost locked on before a white light made my eyes bleed. I shielded them as if it was right in front of me, and the scope pulled back.

“What the fuck was that?”

An engine growled in the distance, and a puff of sand shot from the edges around the light.

“Tiny, stay behind me.”

He purred, shaking the ground as he slithered out of view. I could feel his multi-ton shell splitting the wind with his sheer size.

So what if the smallest bolts holding him together were bigger than me? They weren’t getting to Tiny.

…

It was huge. Not Tiny-level huge, but damn. It looked like a white IMC Paladin tank, just not with the “tank” parts. A rocket-thruster-system-whatever pushed it a good 160 km/h towards us. The six wheels underneath it spun wildly, carving the desert sand with treads deep enough that I could’ve sank my foot in them. Hell, the tires themselves were so big they would’ve come up to my shoulders if the person driving it was stupid enough to get that close.

The wheels locked, and the not-tank slid to a halt. I cocked my Hemlok, aiming at the beams shining in my face.

“Hi-er…Hello there. Do you speak English?”

I didn’t know what the hell “English” was, but I could understand him just fine.

“If he…or she, doesn’t, how do you expect them to understand what you’re saying?”

This voice was deeper. Frothy, with a gurgle to his words.

“EV,” I kept my voice low, in-helmet communications only, “Get me a read on these clowns.”

“Scanning…”

I read a bunch of confusing data on mismatching biologics and a series of question marks that broke EV’s brain.

“Is this thing even on?”

I cringed as the first man tapped a microphone, my shoulder slamming against my ear to muffle at least one side of my helmet.

“OW-Jesus, Ryder!”

A woman yelled, her voice deeper than most. Smoother.

“Sorry, sorry…Hey, why hasn’t the Architect started shooting at us yet?”

Tiny hissed, shining red light on the not-tank as he bared his “fangs.”

“I don’t know,” The frothy man scolded, “You’re the Pathfinder!”

That answered most of my questions.

“I flicked the laser sight on my gun, shining it on what I guessed to be the cockpit.

“You there, Outlanders! You’re infringing on Frontier Militia property! Identify yourself!”

There was a slight pause, and a breeze shifted the tension elsewhere. Muted bickering ensued, and I lowered my weapon in disbelief.

“HEY!”

They quieted.

“Put your gun down, I’m coming out!”

The side of the vehicle lifted, and a black figure squirmed next to it. He had his hands
raised, and his chest facing me.
“We don’t put our ‘guns down’ in the SRS, mate.” My laser took to his chest, underlining my point, “Now, tell me who you are.”
“I’m a Specialist within the Pathfinder Recon Team that’s traveled a very long way to find that Architect.” He stopped a short distance, lowering his hands, “She’s got a helmet on, too. Is the air safe to breathe here, SAM?”

I cocked my head, “My name’s not-“
He held up his finger, like he was taking an important phone call.
I bit my lip, ready to put a bullet in his helmet and show him how not safe he was.
More importantly, I wondered how a ship got past the Outer Ring; a literal ring of space stations that surrounded our slice of the Frontier. They were floating outposts equipped with large-scale EMPs capable of sinking an entire IMC fleet, Mythos Station 0-93 being the biggest.
The probable cause was, this ship got past the Watchers on Mythos because they hadn’t been looking for an IMC fleet. After all, why would they come here? We’d just kicked their ass in the Typhon War.
I realized that, just like them, Tiny and I made a mistake within the last 24 hours.
Me in the morning, at the cemetery with Jack. Him at night, retelling his defeat on Eos, wherever that was.
We were stuck on remembering what was, rather than facing what was now.
A shifting body scattered the not-tank’s headlights into rays, giving it a holy outline.
“Pathfinder Ryder,” He extended his hand, “Call me Scott.”
Cut From the Same Cloth

Chapter Summary

In a universe with so many different worlds, it seemed impossible for any two groups to be so similar. Yet there they were, acting as mirrors.

Chapter Notes

[MjrGenMatt]: Happy Valentine's Day, everyone! Or, if you'd prefer, happy Wednesday, everyone! I've Titanfallen for all of you! *awkward cough* Anyway, there's a special surprise in this one for all you fans out there (looking at you, Alexa), I hope you all enjoy!

Chapter by MjrGenMatt

The sands shifted as a hot gust rolled through the desert. The sun was bearing down like never before. I swore if I stayed out there for twenty minutes I’d have been dead for sixteen. My mouth was dry as a bone, like I’d been chewing on dirt for the past hour. The sounds of some exotic bird-thing reached my ears, signaling to all who could hear that its next meal was quite possibly on its way. Every so often I had to stop and wipe the sweat from my visor, making me thank the fact that my helmet had cooling vents.

I made my way up the dune, cursing under my breath as I realized the next was even steeper. Seriously, how the hell do desert landscapes stack like this? I passed by some kind of
vibrant desert plant, making a mental note of its position in case I needed to come back this way. When I finally crested the top of the dune, I spotted my objective.

Cradled between two cracked pieces of sandstone jutting from the ground like spires, the target adjusted the dials on his scope, attempting to account for the rapidly changing winds. Every ten seconds or so the dust devils would swirl in a different random direction, making the sniper’s task even more difficult.

Crouching as low as I dared, I began advancing on the sniper. Luckily, he was facing away from me, no doubt tracking someone in the valley below – I had to act quickly. My leg muscles screamed at me as the numbness started to become more pronounced, and my boots felt as if they were made of lead from all the sand bulling its way into them. When I was maybe ten meters out, he lifted his head, as if hearing me closing on him.

I immediately hit the deck and froze, preparing to go weapons hot if he turned. We stayed in these positions for several seconds, and my mind began to race. Another gust tore through the surroundings, and the sniper went back to his scope, evidently satisfied that he was not under threat.

How I’d make him regret thinking such a thing.

I stood back up, only a little worried that my exhausted legs would give out on me after the several-hour trek through the unforgiving desert. After making my way to him, I pressed the barrel of my G2 against his helmet.

“End of the line for you, bud.”

The sniper flinched, knowing he was well and truly caught.

“Figured that was a Wraith skulking around back there, not some upstart wannabe.”

“This upstart wannabe just ended your crusade, so why don’t you start praying now?”

The sniper was quiet for a moment, before uttering just one word.

“Shit.”

“Time’s up, sorry it had to end this wa-“

“Drop the gun, Pilot.”

I turned to a mountain of scales and muscle staring me down, as the unmistakable barrel of a shotgun pressed against my back.

This isn’t how I expected this encounter to go.

I exhaled sharply through my nose. How could I have been so unaware? The muscle lizard continued.

“You almost had him there, I will admit, but you’re finished.”

“And that would be where you’re wrong, ugly.”

My sister’s confident voice trickled through my earpiece, and a wave of relief washed over me. Craning my neck even more, I could see her standing there with a wide stance and her Smart Pistol drawn, the reticles lit up marking all the lizard’s vital areas.
“Ugly? That hurts, squishy.”

“Aww I’m sorry, did I hurt your fragile male feelings?”

“Liera not that I’m not loving this, but monologuing is how I got into this situation.”

“Maybe so, but you’re forgetting how much better I am than you at this, Jack.”

Ouch. If we made it out of this alive I was so going to return her birthday present.

“Now where were we…oh yes, your total and unconditional surrender!”

Liera always sounded so damn cocky when she thought she’d won… Yet another combatant called out, causing her to yelp.

“Hate to crash this little party we’ve got going on here, but I’m thinking this is the part where you die.”

The owner of that flanging voice was a female, looking like a cross between a bird and a dinosaur. The sniper at the front of this conga line of attempted murder spoke.

“This is getting ridiculous, somebody shoot somebody before I die of boredom.”

“Excuse me, Ryder, I was just in the middle of saving your ass. Least you could do is be a little more respectful.”

Ryder sighed.

“Yes, yes, thank you Vetra. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“Thank you. Your turn, Drack.”

“Uhh, what the serious shit is that?”

Drack pointed to a particularly shiny section of sand. Everyone turned to look, keeping their guns trained on the backs of their targets. The shiny thing moved closer, and I eventually recognized it as a drone. On its back was a small green brick, with a faint, yet noticeable blinking red light. Come to think of it, it looked very familiar…

“Liera…does that thing ring any bells for you?”

She studied it briefly before her eyes shot open wider than the maw on the muscle lizard poking my spine with his boomstick.

“Oh hell, GRENI-“

A sixth figure launched himself from over the top of the sandstone.

“SURPRISE!”

The charge on the drone detonated, and everything went black.

…
I don’t know how long it took for me to come back to my senses, but Christ did it feel like my brain met the business end of a sledgehammer. Feeling returned to my extremities slowly, and as soon as I was able I ripped the AR suit’s helmet off my head.

I felt absolutely disgusting… the torrid heat from the simulation made my whole body sweat, even more than last night with Sage…

Liera looked no better than me and sounded even more irate.

“God DAMN it Grenier, how many times have I told you not to use Exploding Widget in the simulation!? It glitches out the whole fucking thing and kicks our gray matter around like an unwanted dog!”

Widget. Grenier’s self-described best buddy and master hacking tool. Little bot’s also basically the guy’s teddy bear - everywhere he goes, so does Widget. On missions, to the mess hall, to his bunk, to the can…

You get the idea.

Chris Grenier, our resident tech expert and fuckboy. Occasionally moonlights as the target of my sister’s unbridled rage.

“Aww come on Lasti, that was so cool! I put C4 on it! Did you see my little dude go? He kicked all the ass!”

Liera squinted harshly as her eyes drilled into Grenier. She made no noise as her chest rose and fell rhythmically. I could tell she was one misstep away from decking him with her prosthetic

Personal experience, would not recommend.

“You are so fucking lucky I don’t have the energy to come over there and take your head off.”

Grenier lost his joy as if a switch had been flipped, and he bowed his head slightly. When my sister was angry, even the fiercest of monsters shrunk in fear. It wouldn’t shock me if even MOB backed down from that fiery gaze…After a pause Liera returned to her rant.

“Ho-ly FUCK that planet is terrible. Remind me why we had to do this exercise in the fucking holodeck, again? How in the world do you people live on that heat-blasted rock?!”

A deep, gravelly chuckle echoed off the walls of the room.

“Yeah, I remember my first time too.”

Clearly this beast had more brawn than brains, testing Liera like that.

“Be nice, Drack. Elaaden isn’t for everyone.”

Vetra turned to Liera.

“It’s…getting better. Once Ryder woke up some of the Remnant tech the planet started undergoing some pretty serious terraforming. Slow, yet noticeable.”

I scoffed at that, crossing my arms in total disbelief, “It’d take more than an act of whatever bullshit deity you believe in to make that place livable.”
Drack said nothing, only pointing at something off in the distance through the window. Everyone turned to see Tiny gliding around, spawning those ever-weird metal creations that looked just like him. The so-called Pathfinder interjected.

“Things like that Architect are what’re changing the planets in our galaxy into something more than murderous shitholes. That’s why we came here, to find out more about the Remnant constructs and how they can magic whole new worlds for us.”

Grenier said what all us Pilots were thinking.

“You guys came a long way for that giant flying sex toy.”

…Or not. Not what my first choice of analogy would’ve been...

Liera’s face returned to its signature scowl as she totally ignored the nonsense that just came from Grenier’s dehydrated brain.

“Okay, first of all his name is Tiny. Second, how the hell do you plan to get him back to where he came from? Third, don’t care about your answer because you aren’t taking Tiny from me.”

The outsiders all shared a look of confusion, staring at each other before turning back to Liera.

Drack let out a hearty laugh, “Hah, I like this human! She might be even tougher than you, Ryder.”

“Oh shut up, old man…”

Vetra waved them off, “Clearly we have a lot to talk about. Don’t worry though, we don’t plan on trying to leave with uhh… Tiny. We just want to study it in an environment outside Andromeda to see how it reacts, maybe learn a thing or two to help us survive over there. Any edge over the Kett is a huge boost.”

Liera adopted a look of deep thought, as if pondering Vetra’s response. I could sympathize with that, even if I had no idea what a “Kett” is. Hell, I’d probably do the same to help bitch slap the IMC into the next dimension. Eventually she relented and nodded.

“Suppose I can accept that. Although, I think you— She pointed at Ryder —might need to brush up on your situational awareness. My idiot brother is as subtle as a truck to the face, so if HE snuck up on you? You’re in trouble.”

“HEY-“

She elbowed me in the stomach, thwarting my attempt at salvaging what pride I had left. Drack laughed again, both at the display and Liera’a comment.

“She might be on to something here. You might be losing your edge, kiddo.”

“I had everything perfectly under control!”

Vetra folder her arms, adorning a totally unimpressed look, “And what exactly were you gonna do Ryder, die?”

Ryder looked between his two compatriots incredulously, apparently not being able to believe that his so-called “teammates” would embarrass him in front of his new friends.
“You’re both on pyjack cleanup duty for the next week.”

Several seconds of silence preceded several *more* of boisterous laughter, with both aliens trying to contain themselves as they nearly fell over. Vetra was the first to find her voice.

“I think I speak for both me and Drack when I say that I would love to see you try, Scott.”

Ryder shut his eyes in frustration and let out a long sigh as his comrades continued to giggle at his expense. When he opened them, he tossed a glance in our direction. Grenier was trying, and failing, to retain his composure at what I could only assume was the thought of Ryder making Drack or Vetra do anything. I wasn’t much better off.

Liera, however, was not smiling. She held a look I could only describe as intrigued. In fact, I believe I saw that she and Ryder held each other’s gazes for a beat longer than normal before simultaneously finding something incredibly interesting to look at on the floor.

Oh.

*Oh.*

Shame, I was just starting to like the guy.

Once this whole circus came to an end, Liera cleared her throat and addressed the Pathfinder team.

“So, let’s all get cleaned up and get some food in us, then I can explain all we know about Tiny. Starting, most notably, with my ability to interface with it.”

Stunned silence was all she got in return. Vetra and Drack stared at each other, then right at Ryder with wide eyes. Ryder, the suave bastard, had his jaw hanging and never let his eyes stray from her. Again, Vetra was the one to break the awkward stalemate.

“We *definitely* have a lot to talk about.”
Instruction Cycle

Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter by Precursor

Temperature: 24 degrees Celsius
Wind Speed: 19 kph
Humidity: 34%
Precipitation: 0%
Time: 14:07

Pilot is displaying signs of irritation.

"Bring it back, Inga..."

Probable cause: Canine companion failed to retrieve a rubber ball.
Suggesting course of action...

"Pilot Lastimosa, if you desire to maintain possession of the ball, I recommend you stop throwing it."

Pilot's facial expression matches archived human emotion: "Confused."
"We're playing a game, EV..."

Opening Archive for transcription...
Inquiry:

"Please define this game."

Awaiting Pilot response.

"It's called fetch."

Pilot is unable to free the rubber ball from canine's grip. Struggle commencing.
Evaluating risk assessment...
Results: Unable to act without incurring fatality.

"I throw the ball, she brings it back, and repeat. For dogs, it's fun. Me? Boring."

Pilot forcefully retook possession of the ball before throwing it farther.

"She kept chewing on the couch. I figured she needed the exercise."

Closing transcription.
Data log: "Fetch," archived under, "Games."
Comparing similarities...
Match found.
Description: and passing possession of a leather ball outside of the Lastimosa residence.
Sounding off for confirmation...

"This is similar to when Captain Lastimosa and Pilot Cooper played, 'Catch.'"

Pilot is displaying signs of grief.
!ALERT!: Error repetition, 45th offense.
Description: Mentioning Captain Tai Lastimosa.

"Yeah...it's similar, alright. Jack's got about the same cranial capacity as Inga."

Pilot has suppressed grief with humor.
!ALERT!: Vanguard Processing Unit has found a secondary match.
Description: The Remnant construct known as "Tiny," destroying various layers of outlying ruins.
Suggesting course of action...

"Pilot, requesting permission to traverse to the Harbor District."

Pilot Lastimosa is tired and does not wish to travel.
Commencing persuasion attempt #1...

"I can remain unsupervised."

"What do you need from the Harbor District?"
Inquiry processing: Compliance to discuss suggested action may lead to denial of request.

[PILOT'S_LOG__BASIC_TRAINING_019] suggests, "Asking forgiveness is easier than asking for permission."
Persuasion attempt #1: UNSUCCESSFUL.
Commencing persuasion attempt #2...
"I wish to surprise you."

Pilot Lastimosa is unsurprised.
Word choice: Ineffective.

"Yeah, sure. Do what you need to do, EV. I'll be here."

Revising previous entry.
Word choice: Effective.
Persuasion attempt #2: SUCCESSFUL.

"I will notify you via your helmet recall once my project has been completed."

Initializing Titan Transport Tram communications...

"This is T-Squared Rail Operator, Jim Stanford. What's your designation, bud?"

"This is EV-5649 requesting transportation to posted coordinates from sent coordinates."

"Hey, EV. Good to hear from you. I'll have one of my guys swing by in just a sec."

Physics: Improbable.
Relaying discrepancies...

"Thank you for your assistance, Operator Stanford. However, I am unsure a human male will be able to transport my chassis."

"He'll be flying a small carrier, EV...Wait where you are. Don't worry about a thing."

...

Temperature: 24 degrees Celsius
Wind Speed: 19 kph
Humidity: 34%
Precipitation: 0%
Time: 14:45

Scanning drydock for target...

Container C4: Loaded with SRS-branded explosives.

Unviable option.
Scanning...

Container B7: Contains a shipment of raw materials from Talon Manufacturing.

Unviable option.
Scanning...

Container J11: Loaded with grain materials from Jackal Grasslands.
Hidden narcotics detected.
!ALERT!: Sending report to archived contact, "Radiance Police Department."
ADDITIONAL NOTES: Recommended improvements for Immigration and Customs scanner drones.

Unviable option.
Scanning...

Container D19: Empty.

Viable option located.
Opening communications channel with Drydock Quadrant D Supervision Tower...

"This is Buck."

"Hello. This is EV-5649 requesting possession of shipping container D19."

"Uh...aren't you, like, a Titan?"

"Yes. Vanguard-class. My assigned Pilot is Liera Lastimosa."

"You lost or something?"

"Negative. I require an empty shipping container for a project imperative to the preservation of Radiance's outlying ruins."

"Hey, guys, check this out...Uh, yeah, you can take it."

"Thank you."

Communications transmission concluded.
Initializing retrieval protocols...

!ALERT!: Incoming transmission.

"EV, why did Bucky just tell me you're over there asking for a shipping container?"

Left armament attached to forefront of shipping container.
Right armament attached to backend of shipping container.

"I require this shipping container for your surprise."

"What did I tell you about ordering yourself mod kits?"

"You told me that it should be a joint decision. I answered with the rebuttal that my desire for a new Titan Weapon overrode my desire to honor your request."

Initializing horizontal compact protocol...

"OW! Fucking hell, what was that noise?!"

"I am compacting the shipping container."

Initializing vertical compact protocol...

"That wasn't an invitation to do it again!"

"I am sorry. En route to Tiny."
"What?! EV, tell me what you're up to right now!"

Initializing long-distance travel loadout...
Object mounted on hull: 2,300 kg.
Initializing counter-weight thrusters...

"Negative. That would ruin the surprise."

Temperature: 24 degrees Celsius
Wind Speed: 19 kph
Humidity: 34%
Precipitation: 0%
Time: 15:38

Tiny is observed as "bored," through neural-link transmission.
Initializing Fetch protocol...

"EV-5649. There seems to be an error in your programming. Self-designated 'Fetch,' protocol is classified as trivial. Sending Observer for diagnosis and repair."

"Negative. This 'game' is classified as 'fun' by our operating Pilot."

"Decoding Fetch protocol..."

"Do you agree to execute this protocol, Tiny?"

"Please do not call me that."

"Pilot Lastimosa believes you enjoy the designation."

"Pilot Lastimosa is wrong."

Archiving data log correction...

"Please answer my previous question."

The Architect has agreed.

"Executing Fetch protocol..."

...
"You and Tiny are cut from the same cloth, aren'tcha?"
    She barked as if she was confirming my accusation. She looked at me with that stupid, "tongue-out-and-drool-all-over," face she had.
"Pilot," EV bent backwards, winding up for the pitch, "The Architect does not like being called Tiny."
"What?! I thought it was cute."
    EV launched the ball, "He prefers to be called by his true name, which is..."
    The mechanical nonsense of whatever "The Architect's" real name was screeched through her speaker in an audible burst of chirps and bouncing frequencies.
"Right." I stretched, "Tiny' it is."

Chapter End Notes

**Behind the Scenes:**

"An instruction cycle (also known as the *fetch–decode–execute* cycle or the fetch-execute cycle) is the basic operational process of a computer. It is the process by which a computer retrieves a program instruction from its memory, determines what actions the instruction dictates, and carries out those actions."
Chapter Summary

Everybody makes mistakes, it’s a part of human nature. Some, however, take this as a challenge.

Chapter by MjrGenMatt

“And why, under any condition, would I ever do that?”

“Because, Grenier, you owe me for setting you up with Sage’s friend.”

“Man how long are you going to hold that one over me? She wasn’t even a good date!”

“And whose fault was that, hmm?”

“Who doesn’t like robots, Coop?! Come on, tell me I’m not crazy here!”

“I would, but I promised dad that I wouldn’t lie to people anymore. Can’t break a promise to my old man.”

I smirked. Chris let out a frustrated sigh and threw up his hands.

“I give up. You and Lasti are too fucking much. You’re lucky that you and her are certified badasses or I’d dump both ya stupid selves in a minute.”

“Luckily for you our badassitude isn’t likely to go away. Plus, she’s your CO, and I’m her brother, so we aren’t either.”

“…Remind me why I’m listening to you, again?”

“Come on you big baby, let’s do this. Trust me, it’ll be funny.”

“Funny right up until this giant thing eats us…”

“Look at it this way, you’ll have me and BT backing you up, right buddy?”

I put a hand to my earpiece as BT’s voice came through.

“Respectfully, Pilot, I would not help you fend off Pilot Lastimosa and/or EV-5649. Not only are they equal in combat effectiveness to us, but they would surely enlist the help of the Architect to, as Pilot Grenier put it, ‘eat us.’”

Definitely not relaying that message.
“He says he’s got our backs.”

“Somehow I doubt it.”

Grenier stopped his bitching as we rounded the last bend, and there sat Tiny. The big lug was… sleeping? It wasn’t moving, but several glyphs flashed across what past for his face. We closed the gap, and I was reminded of why I never get close to this thing.

Maybe it’s some holdover of my fear of Titans, but this giant bastard still scared the piss out of me.

“Alright go on, hook up to it.”

“How the fu- Cooper what exactly do you expect me to do here?”

“I’m not the tech jockey, bro, you figure it out. I’ll keep watch for my sister.”

‘Eat shit’s,’ fuck you’s,’ and various other obscenities filled the air as he got to work. He pulled his tablet and Widget from his bag, and I left him to his business. I found myself a nice shaded spot and sat down, pulling the brim of my cap down to better shield my eyes from the unusually brutal sun. Light filtered through the breaks in the leaves, glinting off parts of my G2. My eyes drooped, and I slapped myself to stave off sleep. If Liera came by and not only saw Grenier messing with Tiny, but saw me sleeping on the side, letting this happen? I wouldn’t even see Tiny coming.

I really need to start visiting Sage earlier in the day…

Minutes turned into an hour, and I continued to attempt to avoid nodding off. I rubbed the sleep from my eyes, and tried to shake the bleariness. Grenier continued to tinker, sweat pouring from his brow. A yawn stole whatever words I was about to yell to him, and my armor kept me from standing, or doing much of anything. The heat crept into my frame, until I drifted to sleep.

…

I awoke with a start, feeling a very cold and very wet something brushing my arm. A dog stood in front of me, our dog Inga. Her ears were perked up and her mouth open, the dog panting happily. I extended an arm out, petting the pooch’s head.

“Hey girl, good to see ya. What’re you doing out here? Little warm out for a walk, ain’t it?”

She cocked her head to the side and barked at me. I pet her once more, my eyes half lidded. She leaned into my touch, soaking up the attention I was providing. Realization hit me like a ton of bricks.

If Inga was here…

“Hey, where’s Liera at, girl?”

The dog barked once more, and took off towards the city.

Oh dear.
“BT, how long has it been since we last talked?”

“**It has been two hours, forty seven minutes, and twelve seconds since your last transmission.**”

“Three hours?! How the-… where is my sister?”

“Pilot Lastimosa left the hangar several minutes ago, for an unspecified destination. Pilot, **recommend an immediate evac.**”

I bolted upright and scrambled to my feet, adjusting my helmet as I jogged over to Grenier.

“What’s your status, Gremlin?”

“I’m almost done here, for better or worse.”

“You think you could hurry it up?”

“Cooper do you even know how long it takes to code just the instruction cycle on something this big?”

“Can’t say I do, but hurry the fuck up anyway!”

“Do tell, Blackjack, what is the rush?”

“Callsign Maverick may or may not be inbound.”

His hands stopped, and his eyes shot open. Grenier stared at Tiny, at me, and back at Tiny.

“Yep, we’re done here.”

He ripped the cord from whatever makeshift input it was jerry-rigged into, causing a few sparks and some ungodly noise to belch from the port. We shared a glance, and nodded at each other. This was a risk we’d prepared for, a situation for which an established contingency plan existed.

We stowed our gear, making as little noise as possible. All our years of combat training and service were for moments like this. We would not be defeated today!

I stole a look outwards, examining the perimeter of the clearing. I looked to Grenier, nodded, and shot him a signal to move out. As calmly and coolly as we could, we…

Awkwardly ran to the tree line, flailing about in blind terror.

…

“The Pathfinder team says they’re here to study… Tiny… and we hardly know anything about it ourselves. So, consider this a recon mission. Let’s move out, Pilots.”

“Yes sir, Commander Briggs, sir!” The group let out a resounding shout as we egressed toward the
Outskirts. Briggs had rounded up the Marauders and our Titans, as well as the Pathfinder team, for the sake of getting to know our giant snake friend.

“And Pathfinder!” Briggs shouted again through MOB’s loudspeaker. “You and your team, hitch a ride on our Titans.”

Ryder and his team shared a look.

“All due respect Commander, is that safe?”

“Aww what’s the matter outsiders, are Andromeda’s finest scared of a little rodeo?”

At this Drack’s lips tightened around his giant mouth and a growl escaped him.

“Hah! Krogan aren’t scared of anything, let’s go Ryder. Damn things got nothin’ on an Eiroch. Hell, I’ve seen Salarians scarier than these tubs!”

I had no idea what the hell that meant, but Drack’s words did a decent enough job of convincing Ryder’s team to climb aboard one of the many Titans. Drack hopped on MOB, possibly in an effort to show how big his “quads” – I’ve only just recently learned how cringe-inducing that is – are. Vetra nimbly scaled URI, where she and Akane exchanged terse hellos.

That’s actually a duo I could imagine having a lot to talk about, with the whole solo outlaw upbringing and all. Ryder, in his infinite suaveness, hopped on EV’s shoulder.

My grip on BT’s controls tightened. Me and him were gonna have some words.

The squad moved out, with MOB and EV up front. Occupying the middle were AJ, URI, and GZ, with BT and ICE securing the flank.

Again I found myself incredibly tired, and it wasn’t even for a fun reason this time. I blinked, one eye at a time, and sluggishly moved the controls in some semblance of a forward direction. Not many words were shared between the Pilots, more than likely a result of the 0500 mission start time. Vetra and Akane continued to converse, but the other two outsiders remained fairly tight-lipped.

Funny, looked like Ryder had a thing or two he wanted to say to my sister just a minute ago.

My mind entered autopilot, and I lost track of how long we’d been walking. At some point when I looked to my left I saw GZ strolling alongside me instead of ICE, and a private comm request flashed on my HUD. I blinked again, and pressed the button.

“Cooper you do- Whoa, you look rough bro.”

“Get bent. What did you want?”

“Shit, someone didn’t get laid last night.”

“Grenier I swear if you keep this up I’ll shove you into the river.”

“Allright, alright jeez… You do realize what’s about to happen once we get to Shorty up here, don’t you?”

“I don’t know what the hell you’re-“ I could almost feel the gears grind into place. “Ahh. Yeah, whatever. I’m feeling pretty dead today anyways so if Liera decides to kill me I’ll feel right at
home.”

Grenier snickered. “Your funeral, brotha!”

GZ jogged ahead, leaving me alone at the back. Tiny laid ahead, and I continued onward. We reached the giant beast and disembarked from our Titans. Briggs dusted herself down and gave a sharp whistle.

“Rise and shine, Architect!”

The ground vibrated rhythmically as Tiny’s frame hummed, electricity generating and jumping from one segment to the next. His jaws rotated as the core at the center of his head warmed up and became its characteristic red-orange.

That’s about where the normality ended.

An enormous projected HUD rested in front of where Tiny’s face would be. What was shown on it could only be described as a kitten’s face, made from several giant pixels. As Tiny became more lucid, the face cycled through a range of emotions, eventually settling on a cutesy smile. The eyes closed, angled in such a way as to express happiness, and the mouth curved upwards. Briggs voiced the obvious confusion amongst all of us.

“What… the serious fuck?” She pinched the bridge of her nose and let out an exasperated sigh. “Why the hell does it look like my daughter’s Saturday morning cartoon?”

Drack jumped in. “Finally, something we can agree on, human. The first part, anyway.”

Vetra’s mandibles flared, but she said nothing. Akane remained silent as well.

Ryder, standing next to his squad mates, visibly relaxed and crossed his arms. “I gotta say, if they all looked like this I might not have shot at them as soon as they started ripping up planets.”

Liam’s face wore a tired smirk, though whether it was because he actually found it funny or because he knew someone was about to get reamed, I have no idea.

Sage squealed and shook her fists in front of her face. “It’s so CUTE! Jack doesn’t know what he’s talking about, this beauty is a marvel!”

Liam put his hand on Sage’s shoulder. “Settle down, Talon, the show’s about to start.”

This was the hardest I had tried in my entire life to avoid laughing hysterically. I kept my eyes forward, trying to focus on keeping my breathing even. A hand clapped my shoulder. Grenier, unfortunately, was not able to keep the giggles in. He struggled to regain his composure, and wiped a tear from his eye.

“Shit, Coop, you were right, this was so worth it! Just look at ‘em! Look at their faces! Some fine work if I do say so my-” He immediately slapped a hand over his mouth, eyes going wide.

All eyes were on us, no doubt as a result of Grenier’s loud outburst. Briggs was glaring daggers so big I felt the blades slipping into my ribcage from here.

Come to think of it… where was my sister?

Grenier was suddenly lifted from his feet, regaining the attention of everyone present.
Liera’s eyes looked as if they were literally ablaze – if Briggs had daggers, Liera was brandishing flaming swords. The fact that she had lifted a man half a foot taller than her clear off the ground actually terrified me.

“Commander! Help me out, here!”

“Not a chance in hell, Grenier. Nothing I could do would save you from Lastimosa right now.”

I backed away from the angry tiger in front of me, until Liera’s head snapped to me and she barked out. “JACK!” I froze, ready for the void to take me. She swiveled back to Tiny, and cocked her head in my general direction.

The previously adorable face changed in an instant. The HUD turned red, the eyebrows angled downwards, and the mouth kept its smile, taking on a terrifyingly sinister edge.

“Well, I did say I was ready to die…”
The Militia already had their pair of renowned super-siblings…
Liera and Jack weren’t about to hand over that title.

They’d been here for a week.
Vetra, the Turian rogue who had a sly comeback for anything anyone had to say. Drack, the Krogan warrior who constantly demanded rematches whenever I beat him in an arm wrestle. And Ryder…

Well, he was sneaking us through his ship, trying to not get us busted. What would get him in trouble for bringing me there? I didn’t know.

But from what I saw, they’d spared no expense when they built the Tempest. The Pathfinder’s quarters was no exception. And amidst all the polished wood, stainless steel, and decorative glass paneling; on his desk sat a floating mass of…

Something.

“Good evening, Pilot Lastimosa.”

I jumped back, having got too close in my moment of curiosity. The hairs on the back of my neck stood straight, and my heart jumped in my chest.

“Scott, what the fuck?”

“Easy, easy,” He let out one of his stupid, melodic laughs, “It’s just SAM.”

My brows creased, “SAM?”

“He’s an AI that my father designed to be compatible with my mother’s engineered biotic implants.” Scott leaned his side on the wall, facing me, “Anyone with an implant can take advantage of his…unique properties.”

I had a bit of experience dabbling with the creations of my parents. Much akin to his implant, my cybernetics were similar. Still, Scott’s candid response surprised me, even if it sounded a little rehearsed.

“What can he do?”

“A lot of things. He can switch my profile on the go, giving me different abilities as I need them. He provides me advanced situational awareness, problem solving—“

“So he’s basically a Vanguard AI?”

“You’ll have to elaborate.”

“Swappable cores at the ready; armed with different loadouts for any kind of firefight.”

He rubbed his chin, “Yeah, I suppose. No one quite knew him like dad did…”

Scott sighed, and picked up his helmet from his desk.

“We’d just crash landed on a planet designated as H-047c. The entire visor of my helmet shattered, and even my Omnitool couldn’t fix it…The air wasn’t breathable. My father gave me this helmet, and saved my life by sacrificing himself.” He put it back down, “And then SAM was transferred to me.”
The story rang unsettling bells.

Jack’s crash landing on Typhon. Tai giving him his helmet and passing authorization of BT.

I wasn’t there for it, but I’d seen the Pilot’s Log.

“That must have been terrible…”

“It was.” Scott looked at me with a sad smile, “Being the son of a Pathfinder, having to fill his position with such short notice…” He tucked a strand of hair behind my ear, and my face flushed, “It made for a lonely life-“

Three angry knocks came at the door.

“SCOTT!” And another, “OPEN UP!”

Whoever it was, she was pissed.

“Coming!” His suave, mysterious undertones disappeared from his voice.

He was nervous.

“Uh…shit.” He looked around, “Quick, in the closet-“

“Excuse me?” My neck snaked back, “Who is she?”

“SCOTT!”

He flinched, and his shoulders tensed to his ears.

“Never mind…”

He slunk over to the door, and creaked it open just a bit, “Yes, dear sister of mine?”

“I know she’s in there. Don’t even try.”

Scott groaned, and opened the door entirely.

“Fucking another native…That weird disease you caught after Eos wasn’t enough of a wakeup call for you?”

“Pardon?” I crossed my arms, leaning on one leg, “You’ve got the wrong idea, lady.”

Another native…

She obviously had no idea who I was.

“Sorry.” She rolled her eyes, extending her hand, “Sarah Ryder, chief engineer.”

“Liera Lastimosa. SRS Combat Intel Specialist. Top Gun Militia Pilot. Head engineer of Lastimosa’s Armory-“

“Yeah, yeah, I get it. You’re important.” She shifted her glare to Scott, “That just makes this more unacceptable.”

“Does someone want to tell me what’s going on?”

They both looked at me, a grin on Sarah’s face and a horrified frown on Scott’s.

“What did he do, tell you the story about our dad? Show you SAM?”

I shifted my weight, staring at him with just as much venom as her, now.

“That’s what I thought.” She put her hands on her hips, “We need them to work with us, for fuck’s sake. If you get us kicked off this planet-“

“Sarah.” He barked, “I wasn’t-“

“I said, don’t.” She held up a hand.

I felt like I was 16 again; back in the Academy, kissing a boy behind the barracks…Right before Jack caught us.

“You’re an engineer, you say?” I asked.

“I am.”

I tapped my fingers on my arm, looking at SAM, “My mother designed the Vanguard AI while my father designed the Vanguard chassis. The way Scott described the connection with SAM sounds similar to a Titan’s neural link…”

Sarah looked unimpressed, “Please, go on…”

“What if I told you each Titan had an advanced AI crammed into a GPU the size of your palm?”

And then she looked interested, “I’d say there was no safer place for a hyper-sensitive AI than on a 20-foot battlemech.”

I smirked, “Think we could get SAM in one?”

“Maybe.” Sarah shrugged, “But we’re not putting my father’s technology into the hands of a Pilot.”
“I don’t blame you.” I nodded at Sarah, “Never mind.”
“What do you have to do to be a Pilot?” Scott asked.
We both looked at him, disdain on our faces.
I shook my head, making my way past them, “Not a fucking chance.”

“Wait-“
“Nope.”

I walked through the hatch doors, and hit the close button.
I’d see myself out.

...

When mom died, Tai got rid of the forth chair at the dinner table. And when he died, we got rid of the third. The smell of his cigars was still stuck in the wood. It was almost like he was still with us when we had our nightly conversations…
Usually right before Jack ran off to Sage’s.
“Wait,” He mumbled over food with his fork pointed at the ceiling, clutched in his fist, “What were you doing in his room?”
I put my elbow on the table and facepalmed, “After all that, that’s what you’re hung up on?”
“Yes.” He swallowed angrily.
“Ugh…”
“Answer me.”
“I didn’t do anything.” I rolled my eyes, “Jesus…”
“He can’t save you here.”
“Jack, I’m 24 for fucks sake. Almost 25!”
“Yes, I know how old you are! I don’t see the relevancy.”
Inga started barking, energized by our argument.
“Great, now look what you did…”
“All you had to do was answer the question.” Jack tossed her a piece of steak, and she shut up, “So, you really think shoving an AI we know nothing about in a Titan is a good idea?”
“Not at all.” I leaned forward, “But I’m curious.”
He sighed, running his hand down his face, “The last time you got ‘curious,’ you brought a Remnant Architect to Harmony…”
“Yeah, well, Tiny isn’t happy about it either.” I crossed my arms, “Besides, I got shot down anyway.”
“Good. Curiosity kills the cat, as they say.”
I laughed, “Yeah, but…they’ve got 9 lives, too.”
“I’d put you at 2 left in the armory, then.”
“What can I say?” I shrugged, “I’ve always loved a little anarchy.”

...

Jack and I walked through Delta Wing to the briefing room, just like we did every morning. What wasn’t part of routine was the Ryder twins standing in front of Briggs’ desk in full
“Late. Again.” Briggs put a folder down, “Why am I not surprised?”

I cleared my throat, and we both fell in line, “Commander.”

“Since you’ve both decided to grace us with your presence…” She opened the folder, and slid it over, “Why don’t you take a look at this?”

I bit my lip and peaked at the Ryder twins from the corner of my eye.

They looked exhausted.

Dark circles under their eyes. Hair out of place. Clothes wrinkled.

I switched my focus back to the…

Blueprints?

“Wait, what-“

SAM’s prototype into a Titan GPU.

“Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Lastimosa.” Briggs growled.

“This was my idea!” I grit my teeth, and aimed my glare at their stupid, smirking faces, “You smug mother-“

“LASTIMOSA.”

I snarled under my breath, and was surprised to see Jack hovering over me, just as angry.

“Back to what we were discussing, Commander…” Sarah started, “We’re experienced in operations involving the construction of an Ark. The Nexus itself could house hundreds of your ships. With our supervision, we believe-“

“No.” Jack interrupted, “No way are these idea-stealing fucks shoving their shitty AI in one of our father’s Vanguard.”

“That’s not your call, Cooper.” Briggs cut him off, “The SRS always needs gifted Pilots. SAM and the Pathfinder team are a new element on our side of the war. They’re a variable. Unpredictable. Plus, they’ve agreed to help us with Tiny and our investigation into Remnant ruins in the Frontier should we cooperate.”

His fists bunched at his sides, “And who would be this Titan’s Pilot?”

“Me.” Scott pointed a thumb at himself, “I’m already linked with SAM. All I need to do is run the Gauntlet. And I wouldn’t even need a jump kit.”

Scott Ryder, enhanced with naturally-occurring biotics that gave him super-human abilities…

Almost just like me.

“The only problem is, we would need someone to oversee that Gauntlet…” Briggs sighed,

“Talking someone into that will be the trick. I’m sure to get some backlash-“

“I’ll do it.” I blurted, “I’ll be his Overseer.”

“Oh?” She perked up, “And why would you want to do that?”

Another Pilot that could keep up with me- a cybernetically enhanced killing machine...
They weren’t getting off easily.

“Because if someone’s going to pilot a Vanguard, they need to prove they’re the best. Who better to judge than a Top Gun Pilot?”

Yeah, I pulled that card.
And Briggs bought in.

“Fine.”

Ryder wasn’t about to replace the Lastimosa name in the books…
That was for damn sure.
The Four Horsemen

Chapter Summary

The road to becoming an apex predator is filled with tests. Some simply forget to read the textbook.

---

Chapter by MjrGenMatt

'Target, human male, approximately age 25-30 years. Moving at a slow pace, left to right. Distance roughly two thousand three hundred meters. Count to four. Inhale. Count to four. Exhale. Window's closing, take the shot.'

The rifle stock bucked hard against my shoulder as the round left the barrel at 340 meters per second. My eye remained glued to the scope, intently watching the unsuspecting target. Several seconds later the bullet met its mark and a burst of metal and plastic exploded into the air. Headshot, tango down.

“Hell yeah! New long distance record, I am the man!”

"Leave it to the jarhead to brag about his ability to sling lead at non-hostile targets. Slay me with your unmatched prowess, master.”

The voice of an unamused Sara Ryder hit my eardrums, thick with contempt at my obvious boasting. I turned to look at the enemy of fun. Her arms were crossed, and she wore a scowl not unlike one that Liera would adopt when a grunt tells her that the morning drills were making him chafe.

“It's alright, Specialist Ryder, we can't all be the best.” I shot her a half smile as I slung the Kraber over my shoulder which was immediately met with a scoff and an eye roll so aggressive I thought she'd lose those big blue eyes of hers.

Moving on…

“Don't let your ego get too big, Pilot, your helmet will pop right off your pretty little head.”

I put my palm to my cheek and gasped. “You really think I'm pretty?”

Her expression melted and she gave a soft chuckle.

“Pretty dorky, maybe. Come on Pilot Cooper, I've got another competition for us to try.”

…

'Burnt wire cluster, will need to remove and replace. Soldering likely needed. Seal puncture in hydraulic line, weld fracture in hull. Starting with—'

“Done.”

My eyes snapped open and flew over to Sara, who was standing straight with her arms crossed once again. This time, her face held a cocky smile, while mine was unceremoniously open.

“Careful Cooper, you'll let flies in.”
I shook my head in disbelief. “BT, there's no way she's done already!”
“Specialist Ryder has in fact completed the standard field repair exercise. Her time of three minutes and forty two seconds outpaces your record time by a factor of two point four.”
I looked between my Titan and the pain in my ass incredulously.
"Unbelievable, in a few weeks you've gotten better at Titan field repairs than I have in months!"
“It's alright, Pilot Cooper, we can't all be the best.”
I narrowed my eyes at the blatant revenge for that very same crack earlier. Laughter bubbled from me, and Sara joined in shortly after. I leaned back against BT’s leg and sighed. “You know something, once you get past the smartass attitude you're pretty alright, Specialist Ryder.”
“And you're pretty alright once you get past the macho man pretty boy jawn you got goin’ on. And please, call me Sara.”
I’d figure out what that meant later.
“Only if you call me Jack.”
“Deal.”
She offered a raised fist, and I offered mine right back. I picked up a nearby shop towel and tossed it to her, and grabbed one for myself. I wiped the grease and sweat from my hands and brow. Stealing a look at the female Ryder, I made a note of her demeanor. She removed her hair tie and shook out her hair while taking a deep breath before smoothing out her sweat stained tank top.
Sara was by no means an unattractive woman. Maybe not for everyone, but she knew how to flaunt what she had. I caught myself after this thought and cringed at my own behavior. Not only was it unbecoming of me to think that way as a host, but as a professional military member, and a man.
Years of being in such a male-dominated field had undoubtedly made her used to hearing such things, but I didn’t want to count myself as one of ‘those guys.’
“Take a picture, Jack, it’ll last longer.” She smirked at me.
At this point my face was going to cave in from the amount of cringe.
“I uhh… I’m really sorry, I didn’t mean to stare. I meant no disrespect.”
She let out a tired laugh. “Relax, Jack. I bet I can hazard a pretty good guess as to what you were thinking, and I know you weren’t trying to be a dick. I knew what I was signing up for, becoming an engineer and joining the Alliance military, and I’m used to it. I also know how to handle myself.”
“You- you read my mind, Sara. Guess I won’t push it, then.”
“Smart man. So tell me about yourself, we haven’t ever sat down and talked.”
“I don’t know where to start…”
“From the beginning. If we’re going to fight together, we should probably know each other as well as possible.”
Smiling, I crossed my arms. “I can get behind that. Alright, from the beginning then. I was born in Angel City to a single mother, but raised by Evelyn and Tai Lastimosa. Mom was a researcher, working on a huge assortment of things to make life on the Frontier better. She was real sick at the time when Liera was born, when I was around five, so she didn’t have too much longer. So no, she isn’t my actual sister, but I treat her as such and I would do anything for her. Dad was a real top gun Pilot, made his own armory and had a hand in the series of projects that made the Militia’s very first custom Titan model. He died not too long ago, killed by the IMC. He transferred control of his Titan to me, and that’s how I got catapulted from a simple rifleman to a Pilot. Ever since then me n’ Liera have been kicking ass and taking names up and down the Frontier.”
“Damn, that’s a rough ride. I’m sorry about your parents, biological and otherwise.”
“Thanks, but it isn’t something I dwell on. What about you? Let’s hear your life story.”
“Mine’s not too far from yours, believe it or not. Born on what we call the Citadel, joined up with the Alliance to satiate a love for studying ancient tech built by a race that came before us called Protheans. My mom, Ellen, was waist-deep in the development of biotic implants used in humans. This work made her sick too, from exposure to the catalytic component behind it known as element
zero. Terminal illness, not much to be done.”

She took a breath before continuing.

“There’s a lot of details in between, but now she’s cryogenically frozen aboard an ark back home, where she’ll stay until some sort of cure gets cooked up. Dad, Alec, was an N7, serving in the Alliance during the First Contact War. That was fun, humans and the Turians shot at each other for a few months before they realized how thick they both were. Anyway, dad died when we first got to Andromeda. He and Scott were investigating some ruins that turned out to be Remnant when something malfunctioned and blew a hole in Scott’s visor and he started losing air. His omni-tool couldn’t seal it, so dad gave Scott his helmet and transferred the Pathfinder role, along with SAM, to him.”

I gave a low whistle. “That’s quite the story, and I see what you mean about the similarities. Freaky. Then, it’d only make sense for you and Scott to take on Liera and me in the best sibling rivalry that this universe has ever seen. So when can I expect you to get your first crack at being a Pilot?”

When she didn’t answer I looked over to see her staring at the ground, eyes slightly glossed over.

“I won’t be joining the three of you on that, Pilot Cooper. Some... Complicated business pretty much deep-sixed my ability to make use of such high level cybernetics.”

The room was briefly reduced to whirring drills as I contemplated how to approach the subject.

“Anything you wanted to talk about?”

“Mm, not really. Maybe one day, after we’ve taken care of Tiny and the Remnant, won our battles, gotten a stiff drink and a good celebratory fuck, I’ll tell you the rest of this one. I’ll leave it at this – Scott and I have run across our fair share of bad guys too. This one just so happened to take my brain stem and shake it like an ADHD kid with a snow globe...”

I put my hand on her shoulder. “I won’t pry. How about this then, the four of us will make the best goddamn Titan crew ever known?” I raised a closed fist.

She looked at it and flashed a genuine grin, returning the gesture.

“Deal.”

Sara and I strolled up to the Gauntlet, Liera’s loud shouts permeating the air for what seemed like miles. This could only mean that Scott was experiencing some growing pains.

How long had it been since I was in this very same position...? Dad was so patient with me, waiting and watching silently as I ran the fucking thing a hundred times in a row until I finally got as close to the top as I ever would.

“Your sister is a real taskmaster, huh?”

“No argument here, she only accepts the best. One time she chewed me out for twenty minutes because I left an online game during the match.”

“Shit I would have to, that isn’t cool! Your teammates needed you!”

“Oh my- no, we’re not doing this right now.”

No sooner than I’d finished the sentence Scott came half sprinting, half stumbling across the line. He was sucking in air like a vacuum, and his brow looked like he’d just climbed out of the ocean.

“What’s happenin’, Pathfinder? This thing as much of a breeze as you thought?”

His eyes went to me as he continued his quest to relieve the whole training course of its oxygen. With a scoff he said. “Just you wait Cooper, soon enough I’ll be the top gun around here.”

I couldn’t suppress the childish giggle that escaped my throat. “Now that is the funniest
joke I’ve heard all day. The twins Cooper and Lastimosa won’t be relinquishing the title of ultimate badass to just some space dick.”

I stopped myself and raised my hands.

"Though from what I hear you already got quite the verbal ass kicking from Liera and your sister, so I think I'll keep my jabs to myself. For now."

Scott scoffed again and turned away from Sara and me. He reactivated his holo visor and ejected the spent magazine from his rifle, swapping it for a fresh one.

"Watch and learn what a Pathfinder can really do."

He sauntered over to the starting line and took off for another run. Sara crossed her arms and spoke. "You know, 'space dick' isn't too far off sometimes. His confidence is unmatched but his hubris makes me want to smack him."

His next couple goes around were just as unsuccessful, and if the rapidly evaporating waterfall was anything to go by, Liera was quickly losing her patience. Scott let out an exasperated sigh.

“Man, maybe this course really is a measure of skill. I’m beat. Liera you mind if I take the rest of the day off? I’m sure I’ll get it next time.”

I winced in anticipation as I watched her last shred of patience snap.

"You need to start taking this shit seriously and giving it some fucking effort, Scott! If you make one little fucking mistake against the enemy here they will torture and kill you, do you hear me? The more you joke around and say 'I'll get em next time,' the quicker you'll get killed! I won't always be right next to you to save your ass and clean up the mess, and I can't lose another one to the IMC like that..."

The silence that followed was absolutely deafening. Sara and I shared a concerned glance, before our attention went to Scott. If sadness and disappointment took on physical forms, met up for coffee, and had a love child from a crazy one night stand, that would be Scott.

Liera’s face experienced a multitude of emotions, before it settled on one part embarrassed and one part frustrated. Hot tears created stains on her cheeks as she abruptly disconnected from the simulation.

Scott watched her go, but made no move to follow. Sara walked over to him and placed a hand on his shoulder. He quickly shrugged it off and dejectedly severed his own connection.

Sara gave a deep sigh. “I knew his attitude and his actions would eventually get him in trouble. Cora could only take so much of him at a time, too. This was bar none the worst thing that could have happened during our training. I should go find him.”

I nodded, and she too phased out. Uncrossing my arms, I stuffed my hands in my pockets and took one last look at the surreal architecture of the simulation before leaving the stones with no one but each other to keep them company.

...
“I’ve seen the way you and Liera look at each other over the past couple weeks, and I can only imagine what you were both thinking when you snuck aboard your own ship to your quarters. I’m not stupid, Scott, despite what you might think. I also realize that it isn’t every day that someone finds someone they actually care about, and even less common that Liera finds a guy that holds her attention for more than a night. Maybe I’m misinterpreting this situation, but I really don’t think I am. So, I’m gonna help you understand some things.”

He spared me a look and laced his fingers together in front of him in his seat.

"I thought you cared too much about protecting your sister from 'just some space dick' to let her do something like this."

"As much as I try to keep her from doing things I think she might regret, sometimes I have to step back and realize how ridiculous I'm being. The overprotective big brother trope has to step aside eventually. Liera's her own woman, almost 25 now. I care more about her being happy than I do nearly anything else."

I paused, taking a moment to choose my next words and consider them carefully.

"Scott, let me tell you about my buddy Ryan."


A black blur streaked across the finish line and I hit the stopwatch. I flashed a half smile to my flank where Liera was standing, arms crossed. As hard as she tried to look emotionless, there was a fire burning in her purple eyes. Scott was hunched over, again drawing huge breaths.

I nudged Liera’s shoulder, and cocked my chin at Scott. She slowly walked over to him, keeping her eyes locked on him. Sensing another’s presence, Scott composed himself, took off his helmet, and stood straight.

“Hey.”

“Hey.”

Sara and I shared a giggle at the high school prom level of awkwardness. I cleared my throat, gaining the attention of both hover-hands dancers.

I pointed at the scoreboard, and all sets of eyes went to the flickering display.

01: L. Lastimosa........00:25:05 [M-COR PILOT]
02: R. Royal..............00:28:85 [K.I.A.]
03: J. Cooper.............00:32.70 [M-COR PILOT]
04: S. Ryder.............00:33.97 [PATHFINDER]

The expression on Liera’s face could only be described as flabbergasted. Her head whipped back around to look at Scott before she caught him in a hug and yelled out.

“You did it, Scott!”

He smirked. “Yeah, I did didn’t I?”

Not to let his ego go unchecked, Sara voiced her opinion. “Yeah, and it only took you-“

She checked her omni-tool. “-twenty four days.”

“Thanks for the support, sis.”

I decided to throw in a few words. “Nice job, space dick.”

“Thanks, Tinkerbell.”

“You’re well on your way, Scott. Soon enough we’ll get you in a Titan with a pretty pink coat of paint and the designation of POS.”

“I’ll have you know-“
“Attention all personnel: we have reports of a large number of Remnant Fleet forces approaching. Pilots, get to your Titans!”

Liera snapped out of her schoolgirl stupor. “It’ll have to wait just a bit longer. Jack, Ryder twins, let’s get moving!”

I took the opportunity to spice things up. “How about a wager, everyone? Lasti and Cooper versus the Ryders, most kills wins.”

Sara took the bait. “No fair! You guys have goddamn Titans!”

My sister jumped in. “That’s funny, I didn’t peg you two for whiners.”

Scott rounded out the circus. “Doesn’t matter, Sara, we’ve got our own edge.” As he said this a blue glow overtook his hand, and hers did the same shortly after.

An interesting development…

The Furious Four exited the simulation, and we began walking quickly through the halls.

“Wait wait wait…” Scott called out, causing everyone to halt and stare at him questioningly.

“Which type of Remnant are we talking about, exactly?”

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