Summary

The Breach has been closed and the war has been won but Newton is missing and Hermann will never stop looking.

Cold- dark...falling.

During Hermann Gottlieb’s first week as an official member of the PPDC a Ranger had told him that drowning was the kindest death a person could have.

He remembered the Ranger, an experienced veteran, had told him drowning was less painful than burning and unconsciousness came quicker than a death by bleeding out. When Hermann had asked him how he knew this the answer was blunt and still haunted him nearly 16 years later.

“I know because that’s how my partner died and I felt it happen.”

Sweat ran down Hermann’s neck and pooled uncomfortably in the dip of his collarbone. He stared sightlessly at the close ceiling above his metal bunk as he tried to calm his frantic breathing. It was so cold in the concrete room that Gottlieb could see his breath rising in hectic puffs; lit by the glow of the digital alarm clock in the small shelf embedded in the wall above him.

The bed was uncomfortable. He had piled two thin mattresses on top of a slim foam base but it didn’t help disguise the slab of cement everything rested on. Hermann could feel the bones of his hips grinding against each other as he shifted his weight, struggling to find a comfortable position.

The Ranger-what was his name…why couldn’t Herman remember his name?-was wrong about
drowning. Gottlieb had experienced his fair share of pain in life but in his nightmares he dreaded drowning most of all. Hell was the sensation of sinking downwards into cold black water as his struggles grew weaker and the surface slid slowly out of view.

The drowning dreams were growing more frequent. Most mornings Hermann would wake drenched in sweat, coughing and retching imaginary water from his lungs. At times it would take a good five minutes for the constricting tightness in his chest to ease, for him to remember that he was surrounded by magnificent, life-giving oxygen.

This morning had been a drowning morning and the dream, what he could remember of it, had been particularly intense.

Laying an arm over his eyes Dr. Hermann Gottlieb waited for his heart to settle, taking large gulping breaths of stale Shatterdome air. He had woken before his five-thirty alarm and experience told him that going back to sleep was not a possibility.

Gottlieb reached out and focused on the oppressive dream residue still sticking to his brain. What had happened before he drowned? He was almost positive there had been voices-something large swimming? The images slipped away so fast when he woke up. Like sand through a sieve he couldn’t grasp the particles as they slipped through his mind’s eye.

Newton hadn’t made an appearance all night; Hermann was certain of that. He always remembered if Newton reached out to him. Hermann would grasp at the colorful flicker of tattoos, the familiar freckled grin and pull everything he could back to the waking world like a greedy child; desperate to hold on for just a few minutes more.

Reaching up to silence his alarm before it had a chance to go off Herman wiped the last bits of gritty sleep-sand from the corners of his eyes and assessed his mental checklist to start the day. First thing was first: assess the pain. How bad was the day going to be?

Pushing himself to a sitting position Hermann threw his right leg over the side of the bed and shivered as the bottom of his naked foot pressed against the ice-cold, concrete floor. The tingling in his left leg was immediate and the first buzz of pain arched down blindly from the base of his spine.

Impulsively Hermann reached for his left knee and grunted when he found nothing but air. Ah yes. Number two on the morning checklist-phantom limb pain; always a delight. The neurons in Gottlieb’s brain fired off messages to the ghost of his left leg and he just sighed resignedly. Concentrating hard on imaginary muscles Hermann wiggled invisible toes until some of the pain dissipated and he could gauge the severity of what was left over.

Overall the pain seemed to be hovering at a four. Not bad at all. Not insurmountable by any stretch. If things stayed this low perhaps he could get through the day on half a painkiller instead of the usual full dose.

Grasping onto a steel bar embedded into the wall near his bed Hermann stood on his flesh and blood leg and made slow hopping progress towards his bathroom. It was half the size of a janitor’s closet but that suited him fine. The less space he had to cover in the drowsy early mornings the better.

Clicking on a muted desk lamp as he passed his cramped writing desk Gottlieb spared a sideways glance towards the ancient “castles of the world” calendar hanging on the wall near the bathroom door. The castle calendar was a relic from 2024, the last year the Anchorage Shatterdome had officially been in operation.
Hermann had carefully crossed out the dates and relabeled each month correctly with different varieties of colored pen. He had started recycling the calendar in 2025 and currently each month had been neatly re-labeled four times; it was starting to look a bit cluttered.

Hohenzollern Castle meant it was June. After three and a half years of the same pictures greeting him first thing every morning Hermann had begun to refer to months as castles in his head. An inside joke with himself he supposed. Ah-its getting close to the first of Neuschwanstein Castle must remember to send out the Holiday cards-hah.

Leaning on the doorway Gottlieb considered the day. Today was a Thursday, the 15th of Hohenzollern...Not a day of importance. There wasn’t even a crew coming out from Anchorage today. There wouldn’t be a maintenance check for another three days, not until after the weekend.

Stripping of the old, worn t-shirt he slept in Hermann let his mind wander further through the day’s events. Sensors 49-105 today were due for a check today. Reformatting systems 7-N through 8-M-what was he forgetting? It was something important.

Moving with practiced ease around the familiar space Hermann started the shower and felt a few icy cold water droplets sting his hand as he pulled back from the oversized faucet. As much as he disliked wasting resources it took a good fifteen minutes for the water to become even tolerably lukewarm and really, he had to get over his ration-era thriftiness when it came to hot water. There wasn’t even anyone to share it with.

Hermann was the only person currently in permanent residence in the Anchorage Shatterdome. He had spent three years and six months worth of castles in the cavernous quiet left behind by thousands of mechanics, engineers and LOCCENT staff. The Jaeger bays were empty, used for storage of decommissioned tech or forgotten bits of post-Breach paraphernalia. Only a small portion of the gigantic facility had electricity and this was confined to the areas that Gottlieb frequented.

While the preservation teams safeguarding the basic structure and upkeep of Anchorage came and went weekly Hermann rarely spoke with them. They were kind enough to his face but Gottlieb was sure they talked about him behind his back. Not that it mattered, as a former K-science officer he was used to idle PPDC gossip. He had been a hot topic of conversation for over a decade now.

Hermann moved robotically through his basic bathroom routine as the water-heater a floor below him chugged to life and struggled to give him a halfway decent shower. Staring in the chipped mirror above his sink Hermann regarded his own sallow, haggard face.

Stubble was building along the sharp arch of his jaw and Gottlieb reached to the neatly organized rack where he kept his toiletries to find the generic white-label, ration-grade facial cleanser he used as shaving crème was gone.

That’s right. He had thrown out the empty bottle several days before.

This realization sparked a second insight; the supply truck was coming today. That’s what he had been forgetting. It was a good thing too he was running low on other necessities like vitamins and laundry detergent.

Gottlieb could have asked the Anchorage crews for emergency essentials at any time if he really wanted to but that would mean unnecessary conversation; not to mention they had their own strict ration requirements he didn’t want to impose on.

The chilly bathroom finally began to fill with soothing steam and Gottlieb inhaled until he could feel the humidity soaking into the bottom of his lungs. It briefly brought the drowning nightmares to
mind-damp, cold and suffocating- but Hermann pushed this violently aside as he navigated the shower door and sat on the special handicap bench built for him under the showerhead.

“Mmm, I think we have some peppermint tea left Newton. Not much but I did put in the proper request forms for more. I requisitioned coffee as well and fresh fruit if any is available …some new books.”

Closing his eyes Hermann let the water run down the sharp planes of his shoulder-blades and the hard knobs of his backbone. His voice bounced off the sides of the tiny shower and filled the space with eerie echoes.

“The e-reader is fine enough but at times it can bother the eyes. I hope they actually take a moment to look over my preferred materials this time. I know his westerns are a guilty pleasure of yours but I can only stomach so much Louis L’Amour.”

The comforting patter of water droplets on tile filled the silence and Hermann used the last shard-sized remnants of his industrial PPDC bar-soap; another item he was sure would be restocked today thank goodness.

Tender prickles of pain moved up his left-shin and Hermann glared at the stub of twisted thigh muscle that was all that remained of his lost leg. He averted his disgusted gaze quickly and reached out to shut off the water with an irritated growl.

Stepping from the warm bathroom back into his freezing quarters was an unpleasant shock but served to rid any remaining drowsiness better than a shot of espresso. Gottlieb got dressed quickly in whatever was on hand and smelled the cleanest. On went layers of undershirts, over-shirts and finally an old corduroy coat; one of the many items stolen from Newton Geiszler’s closet.

It was a hassle putting on his prosthetic leg after his pants but given the cold Hermann considered it worth the pain of rolling his pant leg up and down. Sitting on the bed he pulled his prosthesis from its resting place near the foot of his bed and ran his hands over it, testing the joints with long, practiced fingers.

It was not a pretty object. It was a clunky, durable piece of hardware that he wore out of necessity. It served its purpose as a utilitarian accessory just like his cane and he neither hated nor loved it as anything other than a physical aid. The less he had to think of it the better.

A PPDC engineer had designed it for him and offered to put a powder-coat of some gaudy color over the hard chrome and plastic surface. Hermann could not turn the offer down fast enough.

The soft inside of the scooped brace where he rested the dull edge of his severed femur bone was worn from use. The straps had worn calluses onto Hermann’s thigh and he could feel them rub against the supports as he buckled himself in.

There was no suggestion of a calf, only a long solid bar that ended in a basic spring-loaded wedge that served as Hermann’s left foot. He had other legs. He had more realistic models, running models and one designed for rock-climbing of all things.

They had been gifts from all sorts of grateful survivors and fans after the end of the war. More well-meaning medical companies than Hermann could count he sent him the best prosthetics they made. He had taken their offerings, thanked them and then stuffed the legs into his closet to gather dust.

“I should check my e-mail before the monitors…don’t you think Newton? I don’t think I checked
all the accounts yesterday.”

The quiet room didn’t answer and Hermann didn’t linger on the silence. Rolling his baggy pant-leg down to his shoe he stood and felt the swish of fabric against skin. A brief wave of dizziness took him and Gottlieb leaned his weight backwards, taking three centering breaths before reaching for his cane.

Annoying as always but tolerable.

The walk from his quarters to his monitoring station/lab was very short. Hermann had counted on multiple bad pain mornings and knew it was exactly 540 steps on a good day—around 600 on a bad one; a five minute journey highlighted by dripping, icy pipes and distant tinny echoes.

Hermann had never served in Anchorage during the war. He, like all recruits, had started at Kodiak Island and Dome hopped over the course of his career; Lima, Tokyo, Vladivostok and eventually-Hong Kong. Anchorage was smaller than Lima, more primitive than Tokyo and more advanced than Vladivostok. Hermann didn’t like to think about Hong Kong.

The path to his lab was worn smooth by years of back and forth. Hermann didn’t stray from it, didn’t have to think about anything but his destination which suit him just fine. The door of the lab was locked partially from force of habit and half out of fear the maintenance crew would go poking where they didn’t belong.

The thick metal door complained as it opened, the old hinges groaning as Hermann stepped over the raised threshold. His first week in Anchorage Gottlieb had tripped over the metal lip despite the yellow strip of weathered paint clearly distinguishing it from the floor. He had repainted it himself but the color had faded almost immediately.

“Good Morning Virginia.”

Hermann negotiated a small flight of stairs as the door shut automatically at his back. Jittery overhead lights flickered to life in localized segments as Gottlieb reached the lower floor of the enormous room. Monitors lit up for what seemed like miles in every direction and three large raised platforms immediately began to project brightly colored heads-up displays. They guttered in and out, spewing waves of scrolling graphs and holographic numbers.

A sweet tone, musical in nature, answered Gottlieb’s good morning. It trilled a steady stream of fluctuating noise that changed in cadence and sounded, even to the untrained ear, like a melodic conversation.

“Yes, yes I’ll eat breakfast in a moment. E-mail first.”

A low string of unhappy bass notes met this and was followed by a shrill stream of rapid, jangling chimes; a language somewhere between computer and Casio keyboard.

Hermann shrugged and meandered to a few of the nearest monitors, checking the readouts with mild interest.

“I don’t think that’s any of your business.”

A large worktable buried under a chaotic mess of papers, electronic components and computers sat partially hidden in an alcove between two of the HUD platforms. The only thing lighting the area was a single antique desk lamp and five jars of preserved Kaiju organs.

The largest of these was a stomach housed in a pillar sized container that nearly touched the labs
The smallest was a single nerve ending residing near Hermann’s newest desktop computer. The stomach was mostly stationary but the nerve ending would change colors at random like an otherworldly lava lamp.

The anxiety lingering in Gottlieb’s chest faded as he booted his computer and saw that his terrible internet connection seemed to be holding its own today. Despite his castle calendar claiming it was summer the unnaturally long nuclear winters had other ideas.

The melodic tone voice gave a few random chirps and a low beep that sounded vaguely judgmental. Hermann answered distractedly as he logged into the first of three different e-mail addresses.

“My blood pressure is fine. Pain is at a four. It can wait.”

There were no new messages in the first e-mail, or the second and the third anonymous account yielded nothing but spam and disappointment. Another day without a clue, a tip, anything- any lead at all would have been something. Hermann would have done anything for just a shove in the right direction. He-

Hermann held his hands motionless over his keyboard a moment before settling them on the edge of the desk. His gaze slid over an empty teacup, a pile of yellowed scratch-paper and a few loose stubs of chalk to rest on an old Kaiju action figure. He studied the articulated joints and poorly painted teeth.

Newton had been missing for precisely three years and one hundred sixty five days as of today.

Picking up the toy monster, a figurine of the Kaiju Taurax, Hermann posed its limbs mindlessly. He adjusted the tail and pressed a small button on the creatures back that caused a tired, warbly growling noise to slip from a speaker in its throat. Given its age and the age of its batteries Taurax’s growl was more of an electronic sputter.

If he wanted to Hermann could probably calculate the exact amount of time Newt had been missing down to minutes…seconds. It had been nearly four years since he had last been in the same room as his lab mate, his best friend – his drift partner.

It had been nearly one thousand three hundred days since they had spoken face to face. Roughly thirty thousand hours since he had heard Newton laugh.

Turning Taurax over and over in his hands he traced its sculpted scales, moving shaky fingertips over the tips of its bull-like horns. More of Newton’s figurines were scattered around his workspace. The old piano he toted from Germany to Hong Kong sat pristine and ready to be played near a scanning station. His old bio samples lit Hermann’s world.

Every morning was the same. Gottlieb got up, showered, dressed and checked the unnamed tip e-mails he kept. The reward for information had started at fifty thousand the first year and grew steadily as time passed. Currently the incentive stood at seventy thousand dollars for any information about Newton’s whereabouts and Hermann did not intend to stop adding more if he thought it would help.

None of the e-mails had yielded a real response in ages.

The tone voice voice burbled low and a string of rich rainbow notes filled the huge room.

Somewhere a row of space heaters kicked on and a warm gust of air blew through Hermann’s overgrown hair. He nodded and put Taurax back in his designated spot.
“Alright, let me just check my PPDC account and I’ll take it with toast…”

Switching between his private server and his work one Hermann settled back into his seat, breathing onto the fingers of his free hand to thaw them. It would take at least an hour for the heaters to do any good and no matter how high they were cranked they would do nothing to compensate for the damp air.

Hermann had suffered no shortage of chest colds after taking up residence in Anchorage and the wet was mostly to blame.

The first few e-mails were discarded immediately. Forwarded requests for interviews from television networks or publishers eager for his ghost-written tell all. It seemed no matter how much time passed or how many polite rejections he sent the paparazzi would never stop hounding him.

Newton would have basked in it. He loved the spotlight like a desert lizard loved the sun. The first few months after D-day Gottlieb had allowed dual interviews with Newton and it had been prickly but endurable. They had participated in a live discussion on some American program a week before Newt had left to give a talk about Kaiju cell structure at the University of Hong Kong and well…he simply never came back.

After clearing his inbox of the usual offers of fame and fortune Hermann was left with a an update on July’s maintenance schedule, a reminder of the ration-drop at ten O’clock and a message from-

“Mako…”

The name rolled of Gottlieb’s tongue with a drop of venom. He snorted and bounced his good leg anxiously. Glancing between his screen and his hands Hermann hovered his cursor over the notification without clicking on it. There was no mistaking the address; there were no other Marshall Mori’s in the PPDC after all. The subject line of Mako’s e-mail was short, sweet and cryptic. It simply read: “Urgent: please do not ignore this.”

Thumping his good foot against the ground Hermann put a hand on the back of his neck and fidgeted unhappily. Wrenching to his feet he started to pace back and forth muttering soft obscenities under his breath.

Mako Mori hadn’t e-mailed him in months. He had been ignoring her for months before that. He had thought she had given up on correspondence and this new development unsettled him.

The tone voice made a series of trilling, liquid tones. It whispered comfortingly and ended on a note of higher pitched curiosity; the sound oozing with questions. Hermann paced from his desk to the first monitoring station against a far wall before he walked back and started in the opposite direction towards the soothing sight of his enormous blackboards near the opposite side of his work-desk.

“No. I have no idea what she would want. I had made it clear to her that I have nothing to say to the PPDC proper.”

Picking up a piece of chalk Hermann tapped it against a small empty spot in the nearest corner of one blackboard then stopped and put it nervously back down again. He pushed at the wheeled ladder resting up against the side of the board and listened as it banged into the end of its slide railing.

Gottlieb continued up and down the sides of the warehouse sized lab space in search of any sort of relief. This e-mail brought with it the unpleasant prospect of contact with the outside that Hermann
himself had not initiated voluntarily. It caused a bodily reaction he couldn’t control. His throat tightened and adrenaline started to pump through his blood in alarming volume.

Anchorage was his haven. The Shatterdome was safe.

Hermann only communicated with the outside if he thought it would help him find Newton. He avoided news and had fallen woefully behind on current events. Though he technically worked for the PPDC he put aside all income they gave him, all severance he received from war work. He wanted no part of it and no part of them.

Determined to get back on schedule and away from this new stress Hermann went to the back of the lab and tried to recall which section of sensors needed to be seen to. After his brain settled back into the monotony of his job Gottlieb remembered what areas he needed to tend to and which were in dire need of recalibration.

Although his position technically had no name Hermann knew that the common vernacular for his job was “lighthouse keeper.” After the Breach closure there had been a concentrated effort by countries in the pan pacific alliance and beyond to keep track of ocean-wide seismic activity.

In short; the world riddled with the world’s oceans with delicate sensors of every description to make sure that if another Breach opened they would know about it.

Anchorage’s abandoned Shatterdome was one of these monitoring stations and Hermann himself was responsible for a chunk of the Pacific Ocean that stretched from Hawaii to the edge of the Bering Sea. In all there were about six hundred monitoring stations and each needed constant upkeep. There was always a modification in the math or an adjustment to the scope of any given area. It was an intense, quiet and mercifully distracting job. Gottlieb took solace in it and comfort in the seclusion he was permitted.

Moving through a bank of processors housed in a large room off the main lab Hermann became absorbed in the task at hand. So much so he barely noticed when four hours had passed. A headache that began to tug on the edges of the mathematician’s temples was the first clue. He hadn’t eaten or taken his medication but he had managed forget about Mako’s e-mail…for the most part.

Hermann’s hip was starting to throb on his bad side and he sighed watching the readouts on one of the monitors he was recalibrating. It covered a paltry forty miles of land in the middle of nowhere and it was being particularly stubborn.

He hoped there wasn’t something wrong with the hardware. If that was the case he would have to find the serial number of the tracker and go through a lengthy digital catalogue to find out which country was responsible for its upkeep. Then he would either have to forward the information to the PPDC affiliate or the company they had contracted for maintenance; all in all a massive bureaucratic pain in the ass.

The musical tone beeped angrily in a speaker near the front doorway of the server room and Hermann startled at the sudden intrusion.

“Virginia, if it can wait I-”

A long string of beeps, coos and general electronic unhappiness answered Hermann and he finally gave in with a weary sigh.

“Yes. Yes you’re right. I do need to double-check.”

Although he was not required to be present for supply drop-off’s Hermann had learned from
hard-earned experience that if he wasn’t there to double check everything was delivered he might not receive something for another month. In his first year he had gone an entire month without powdered milk and hand warmers. He would not make that mistake again.

Giving the misbehaving monitoring device one more glare Hermann took his cane in hand and made his way back to the door of the lab. The frigid, well-trod hallway leading down to the kitchen and common area he used was a slightly longer trek than the one from his room to the lab. The supply truck entered the Dome through a small garage just off the defunct hangar bays and the easiest way to reach it was via a hallway once used by construction workers coming in from their Jaeger building shifts.

Hermann removed the towels he had taped around the edges of the bay access door; he kept them there to help with the draft. Gottlieb rarely used the hangar entrance tucked back in the space between his pantry and walk in refrigerator. Unless a particularly melancholy mood struck him he never ventured near the hangars at all. Despite his lengthy stay in Anchorage he barely left the small area he had claimed as his own.

Given its long history emptiness didn’t suit Anchorage and if he was a more superstitious man Gottlieb might have thought the old place was haunted.

The maintenance hall was frozen, the floor shiny with a thin sheet of ice. Hermann hugged the wall with his shoulder, one hand pressed flat against it while the other held his cane white-knuckled. He had already suffered a bruised tailbone in Early January and did not want to repeat the experience.

The tunnel like access-hall lay open at one end and from there Hermann could hear the chug of an engine and the roar of voices; the supply truck was right on schedule.

Despite the bitter cold June was admittedly warmer than deep winter. Before the nuclear strikes early in the Kaiju war temperatures of the upper fifties were the norm but now the snow didn’t leave until late July and everything stayed around the lower twenties; at this time of year the snowdrifts were small and workers didn’t need an all terrain vehicle to reach the Dome. That meant more room specialty goods if Hermann wanted them, a luxury.

Raising the fur-lined hood of his old Vladivostok-issued coat up around his face Hermann pushed into from the entryway into the garage and was immediately assaulted by a blast of cold air that numbed him to the bone. The pain in his head was magnified as he squinted into the wind and saw a small cluster of people unloading boxes with the stark PPDC eagle logo slapped on the side.

One of them spotted Hermann and made their way over, pulling their own hood down so he could see the wind-chapped face of the usual driver. She handed him a clipboard with one gloved hand pointing over her shoulder.

“Hey, Dr. Gottlieb! Give this a quick once over. Does the inventory look ok?”

Hermann accepted the clipboard carefully his lips pursed in a frown when he realized he had left his reading glasses back in the lab. Squinting over his nose he went over the delivery receipt and immediately noticed something odd.

“Mrs. Soto! This is much more than I need! There seems to be twice the usual amount of goods here.”

Soto gave him a quizzical look and pulled her snow goggles up onto her forehead.
“Well yeah…they didn’t tell you?”

“Tell me-what?”

Shaking her head Soto turned and shouted at the hunkered figures still unloading supplies from the huge, six-wheeled truck.

“Yo! Pentecost! Come introduce yourself!”

The bulkiest of the workers looked up, lowered the tarp back down over the remaining freight and turned at the sound of Soto’s voice. Hiking a duffel bag higher up their shoulder the figure vaulted easily to the ground and ambled forward, face and eyes obscured by large sunglasses and a scarf pulled over their mouth and nose.

Hermann felt himself shrink back pulling his hands to his chest involuntarily. The person, definitely male, was built like a tank. He wasn’t as tall as Hermann but by the way he carried himself and the size of his shoulders it was plain he could have hefted Gottlieb up by the collar and carried him like a kitten if he wanted to.

The name Pentecost caught Hermann completely off guard and he immediately ignored the new person in favor of asking Soto more strident questions.

“I don’t understand. Why would I need to know this person?! Why are you-“

Soto cut him off eyebrows furrowing.

“Look Doctor. I know how much you hate company but we have marching orders. Pentecost is your problem now. We’re just here to drop him off.”

For a few moments Gottlieb was sure his brain had gone completely offline. He felt as if his body was suffering through a hard reboot and when it came back to working order he didn’t know which was more palpable his rage or his distress. Still ignoring the man who was supposedly a Pentecost Hermann stomped after Soto, screaming all the way.

“You will do no such thing! What would I do with-with-why would they-“

Mrs. Soto turned, her coat whipping around her body as she snatched her clipboard from Hermann’s unsteady grasp.

“You want to take it up with someone? Take it up with the brass! I picked him up from the airfield and I brought him here and here he’ll stay until we hear otherwise.”

Words caught in Gottlieb’s throat and he spluttered, choking on them. He could feel his face turning red up to the tips of his ears. He rarely traded words with people in person anymore, let alone argue with them.

Turning on his heel Hermann narrowly avoided a patch of ice as he staggered back towards Pentecost. When he spoke it was in hissing, spitting rage.

“Did you ask for a transfer here? Why, for what conceivable reason??”

It was impossible to read the man’s expression behind his hood and sunglasses but his body language didn’t read as friendly. He crossed his arms over his broad chest and spoke in a voice almost too low to hear over the rumble of the truck engine and the whine of the wind.
“If I had a choice I would be anywhere but here. But I don’t have a fucking choice and neither do you.”

The voice was heavily accented, a British dialect different from Hermann’s own. It held the twang of a kid from southeast London while Gottlieb’s was a mush of Manchester and faint Berliner. The inflection was unmistakably familiar and eased all doubt about this Pentecost’s connection to the PPDC.

“You’re Stacker Pentecost’s son.”

This earned Hermann a muffled, derisive snort in reply.

“Was…at some point, long time ago. You saw em more than I ever did.”

Ignoring this and the overt, grinding sarcasm in Pentecost’s tone Herman gesticulated towards the idling semi-truck.

“I don’t see why you can’t just leave. What in the world would bring you here in the first place?”

Adjusting the weight of his duffle bag Pentecost pushed roughly past Hermann to the rapidly emptying supply truck. He surveyed a pile of seemingly identical boxes before grabbing one and lifting it up over his head like it weighed nothing at all.

Moving casually towards the access hall that lead to Hermann’s kitchen Pentecost called over his shoulder.

“Punishment!”

A separate delivery worker who wasn’t Soto pressed an electronic tablet into Hermann’s hands.

“We’ve got to head out Dr. Gottlieb there’s a storm moving in. Could you sign this please? - It’s a transfer order, to show you received everything on the manifest and your new assistant.”

“He isn’t-“

Hermann set his jaw, ground his teeth and realized that it was pointless to argue with a messenger in this matter. Soto was correct, this was not their decision and he would have to go higher up to rectify it. Mako’s e-mail from earlier suddenly leapt back into Gottlieb’s brain and he swore sharply under his breath.

After he convinced the workers to line the supply boxes neatly by the door where he could unpack them later Hermann saw the crew off with a stiff wave, closing the small garage door at their backs. He steeled himself for confrontation and headed back to the kitchen unsurprised to see Pentecost shoving something from the pilfered supply box into his ancient microwave.

Hermann cleared his throat and Pentecost turned. He was still wearing his heavy winter clothing his face obscured. He hadn’t even bothered to take off his sunglasses.

“Now then Mr. Pentecost-“

“Jake.”

“Beg pardon?”

“Don’t call me Pentecost call me Jake. My name is Jake.”
The pain in Hermann’s hip was becoming too much and he knew he needed to sit. Having a stranger in his space was making his headache worse and anxiety was building up in the back of his brain.

He had heard gossip that Stacker Pentecost had another child besides Mako. If the rumors were accurate Jake was Stacker’s biological son while Miss Mori had been adopted from the scene of a Kaiju attack. Mako’s adoption was very much true. Her story and the loss of her family to Onibaba’s attack on Tokyo was common knowledge. She traveled with Marshal Pentecost everywhere and Hermann had practically been an uncle to her from the time she was ten.

If Jake was really Stacker Pentecost’s biological son Hermann was surprised they had never met. While he wasn’t always stationed in the same Dome as Pentecost he often tutored Mako months at a time and a brother named Jake had never been mentioned; not once.

Hermann distanced himself from Pentecost and sat on the edge of an overstuffed chair in the recreation area; his slight weight sent up a cloud of dust.

“Well…er-Jake. Don’t make yourself too comfortable I will see to getting you out of here as soon as possible.”

The microwave gave a piercing beep and Jake yanked the door open pulling out what appeared to be an overcooked PPDC brand hot-pocket. Hermann’s gut tightened automatically, Newton adored hot pockets.

“Nothing you say to the PPDC is going to get rid of me Gottlead.”

“Gott-lieb- and why ever not?”

With a heavy sigh Jake set his oozing junk-food onto the counter and pulled down his hood. He chucked his sunglasses at the small kitchen table, pulled the scarf from his mouth and turning towards Hermann. Blinking against the dim overhead light Pentecost revealed his face for the first time.

His eyes were neon blue, the pupils practically glowing. There were tiny pinpricks of phosphorescence down his dark cheeks, lines of freckles made of specks of light.

Hermann felt his mouth fall open in astonishment.

“My God. You’re an Osedax.”

Pentecost took a huge bite of his steaming off-brand, meat pastry revealing sharp canines and a blue tongue in the process. He gave Hermann a scathing look as he wiped at his mouth with a coat-sleeve.

“Yeah. Osedax, Wendigo, Bone-licker, Breach Baby, Kaiju-kin…take your pick.”

Rooting around in the open ration box Jake pulled out a colossal jar of PPDC ration-grade peanut butter and a box of energy bars that claimed to be chocolate chip. Finishing off his hot pocket in a few sharp bites Pentecost unscrewed the peanut butter Jar and began dipping an energy bar into it; he shoveled the whole mess into his mouth like he had never eaten before.

When Jake’s hood fell back Hermann could see the sparkling bits of glowing skin move down his jaw and neck in intricate, curling patterns. There were bony protrusions, spikes, just visible on the back of his neck but Gottlieb couldn’t get a good look at them from his position.
“So are you going to tell me why they chose to send you here now?”

Pentecost made a non-committal noise, his mouth crammed with food.

“Got in trouble—Mako bailed me out. It was either she send me out here with some looney scientist shut-in or get experimented on in a Kaiju-kin prison facility.”

Hermann crinkled his nose in disgust as buttery crumbs and flecks of chocolate spewed out of Jake Pentecost’s mouth. He was still in a kind of shock, unable to comprehend that he suddenly had a Dome-mate.

He barely registered the insult hidden in the explanation.

“What did you do t-“

“It’s none of your goddamn business.”

Those electric blue eyes were on him and Gottlieb balked at the intensity of them. He had never seen a full-fledged Kaiju mutant up close before. A natural Osedax—or any of the other nicknames for them, were becoming more common on the coasts but they had first started to appear among young adults and children born during the Golden Age; during the early years of the Breach and the Jaeger program.

It had been kept quiet at first but as the number of affected people grew panic and disinformation spread. What Hermann knew about Osedax mutants he knew from second hand drift knowledge and idle Shatterdome talk. Breach babies were not allowed to work in Shatterdomes and from what Gottlieb heard discrimination against them was quite fierce.

To think that Stacker Pentecost, the pride of the PPDC, the savior of the world…had a son who was a Bone-licker; it was unthinkable.

Swallowing down a half-masticated mouthful of granola Jake stuck his head under the kitchen sink faucet and washed everything down with greedy gulps of water. He surfaced with a look of relief and shot Hermann an unimpressed look.

“Look Gottland, We can agree on one thing. I’m not sticking round here long. I’ll figure a way out but it won’t be through the PPDC. This is a big place so how about you just keep living like the recluse you are and we can avoid each other until I’m gone.”

Hermann knew that correcting Pentecost was fruitless. He was obviously mispronouncing his name on purpose in some childish act of rebellion. Jake looked very young, not even on the other side of twenty-five. There was a babyish quality to his face despite the sharp kaiju-shaped edges.

His nasty façade wasn’t very convincing. Gottlieb had known Chuck Hansen long enough to recognize meanness used in the name of self-defense. Hell, if anyone had mastered the bullying armor it was him. It didn’t seem to suit Jake Pentecost at all.

Hermann stood shakily and shrugged. It was true; the Shatterdome was big enough that they could avoid contact for months if so desired.

“Very well, it that’s what you want. My only suggestion, if you wish to take it, is to keep your living quarters close to this area. The rest of the Dome is not heated and rarely lit.”

Jake pointed an unopened granola bar at Hermann as he settled back into a kitchen chair and threw his wet boots up on the clean tabletop.
“Good tip. I’ll take it into consideration Gottlid.”

Hermann turned away without another word unable to work up the energy for a good dry remark. His ability to dish out a solid cutting barb had gotten rusty from misuse. Maybe it was time to start practicing again.

Leaving the rec area Gottlieb made his slow way back down the hall to his lab. There was a fidgety shaking in his hands when he settled back into the chair at his desk and he pressed knuckles hard against his heart in effort to calm the off-beat thumping. In all it was a miracle he had so far survived the day without a panic attack.

“I’m not sure how to handle this situation Newton…It has jumped up and bitten me.”

Leaning forward on his elbows Hermann massaged his temples with a low groan. Brushing the mouse with his elbow Gottlieb glanced upwards as his computer screen popped out of sleep mode. His e-mail was still open and the message from Mako sat prominently at the top, waiting for be read.

Hermann had no doubt what the contents pertained to.

The tone rose cautiously, reaching out to him a series of soft concerned chirps.

“No. It was just-…I’ll explain in a moment.”

Rubbing is palm across his eyes Hermann moved his cursor over the e-mail and opened it, holding his breath. There was no text in the main body of the message but there was an attachment suitably named “Play this.”

Hermann did so opening the video file with a half-hearted click.

He was greeted by the lovely, careworn face of Mako Mori dressed in her full Marshal regalia. She was sitting inside a glass-encased office on the same floor as an active LOCCENT deck.

Hermann recognized the layout immediately as the Tokyo Shatterdome. It brought a shockingly poignant wave of nostalgia over him as he watched techs and dome workers swarming behind Mako, buzzing from one console to another in a flurry of constant activity.

With another swift click the video began to play and a small, tentative smile played over Mako’s face. She still looked like the girl he had spent countless hours tutoring- making shop talk about programming Mach-3’s and rebuilding Jaeger cores.

“Hello Hermann…It has been awhile since we’ve spoken and I hope you are well.”

Gottlieb jiggled his good leg up and down and tapped his fingers, all bad habits that weren’t really his. If his hip didn’t ache quite so badly he would have been pacing back and forth again. He didn’t, he kept to his seat and tried not to look directly at the recording as Mako addressed him.

“I am not sure when you will see this or if you will ignore it…I know you are still hurt-angry at the PPDC and with me but-I need your help.”

Mako Mori did not beg. She was in control and competent and respectful at all times. It was what made her a strong Ranger; a good Marshal. Still-Hermann could hear just a hint of begging in her voice. She was pleading with him and he cringed at the sound of desperation.

“My brother Jake –who you will meet if you have not already, has been in trouble for a long time. This last week he was arrested for the third time in the United States and their policies I-“
She knotted her fingers together, looked down at her hands for inspiration. The blue streak she kept in her hair was gone and this bothered Hermann in some way he couldn’t put into words.

“Sensei was not ashamed of Jake…I know you probably think it’s strange that you had never met him before-heard his name but…that was for his protection. I don’t know if you’ve seen him yet but. You’ll know when you see him why we…”

Mako shook her head and ran a hand nervously through her hair. It made Hermann wish, if only briefly, that she was there in person instead of several time zones away.

“I sent him to you because you are one of the only people I trust completely Hermann. I know it is a lot to ask but if you could make sure he is safe. If you could keep him there as part of his probation agreement than I would consider-“

She raised her eyes back to the camera her eyes glassy with the beginnings of tears.

“I could try to have them re-open Newton’s case.”

All goodwill Hermann felt vanished immediately, drying up like a raindrop in the desert. He gave a loud guffaw and pushed his chair from the desk ready to click the video off in disgust. There should have been no re-open. There should have never been a need for these sorts of negotiations in the first place.

Mako backtracked instantly, as if she had seen his reaction in real time.

“I’m not trying to bribe you-I would be doing it as a favor. I just need you to…please, Hermann if not for that or for me do it for Sensei-for your Marshal. Jake is important to us and I can’t help him. I don’t know where to begin. If you could just treat him with respect I think that would be a good start. He just-he needs someone.”

Looking over her shoulder at the riotous mess of her Shatterdome Mako closed her eyes as if searching for patience, for a way to center herself.

“He will no longer listen to me and I just want to know he is safe. I apologize for giving you no notice but I was afraid you would refuse and I needed to get Jake to Anchorage immediately. Please answer me as soon as you can-“

Mako let out a deep breath through her nose and her stoic expression was so achingly similar to her adopted father’s Hermann had to look away.

“Take care Hermann.”

The message ended and the lab sank back into its usual medley of beeps and humming computer fans. Hermann sank his fingernails deep into the muscle of his bad leg. His empty stomach clenched and he felt a rush of pale, bare exhaustion.

He didn’t know how to deal with this. He couldn’t deal with his own problems what was he supposed to do with a delinquent Osedax kid? He wasn’t a day camp for troubled kaiju youth.

The vague promise to put more effort towards Newton’s recovery was probably all talk as well. No doubt some glittering piece of bait Mako thought he would snap onto. He should have been insulted but-that aside…Hermann had looked up to Stacker Pentecost and loved his daughter as his own family. Why should the younger Pentecost be any different?

Leaning back to look at the dull, grey ceiling Hermann whispered under his breath..
“I suppose we can only take this a day at a time Newton; A day at a time.”

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