Breaking Dawn

by Ngrey651

Summary

The final showdown is here. The real world and the fantasy world of Invader Zim collide in an epic battle as multiple universes and their champions clash for the sake of preserving all Invader Zim means! Can they protect the prime reality? Meta-fiction to pay tribute to the Invader Zim series, both canon and fanon.
I dedicate this to 630kila, and to all the inspiration she has given me over the years. Cassie...this tale I dedicate to you. You gave me so much...much more than you ever realize, and I only hope one day I'll be able to repay you for all your kindness, all your friendship, all your creativity. You helped make me the artist I am, and I will always, now and forever, be eternally grateful for that. Thank you for giving me a chance to fly. I hope you, like the dear readers pouring over this, find this action-packed meta-fictional tale a fitting tribute to your work.

PROLOGUE

"WHAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

The green-skinned being awoke with a start, the bed soaked in sweat as he floundered around atop a thick white blanket, panting and heaving as if he'd been climbing a mountain instead of enduring a strange and surreal dream. His skin was made up of ever-so-tiny scales, almost miniscule to the naked eye, and he had a set of spiky antennae that had stiffened from the shock of his dream.

"What...what was all of that?" The vaguely reptilian, vaguely Insectoid being said in the Irken tongue, his "home language", slowly rising off the bed, looking around the room. Was he still dreaming, he wondered? Was he still that odd being he'd been in the dream?

No...white rose in the flowerpot by his bed. That was the same. Poster of the high Consular urging others to "Live for the Empire" to his right. That was the same. Normal silvery walls and-

Wait. His body. In the dream he'd been...

"Okay...head. How's my head?" He began to feel his head with his gloved hands, still panting slightly. "...totally round...right, round. Round is good. And no hair. Antennas? Good, still spiky. Hands...three claws...not five digits, claws. GOOD, GOOD." He murmured, pacing around the room. "Wait. WAIT."

He stiffened suddenly. In the dream he had been...

A Vortian? Him and a Vortian woman? And with the sister of the one who headed the resistance? That was so ludicrous it was almost laughable. It wasn't physically possible! How ridiculous! How absurd!

"...just to make sure..." he murmured, undoing the belt and loosening his pants to look down and inside...

From outside the room, a giddy almost whooping cry of joy was heard. And so the Senior Communications Officer of the Massive, exited his room to head to his station. He had work to do. Tallest Red and Purple had sent for further workers on the ship...he was supposed to be their mentor, get them acquainted with what they were to do since they sure as hell weren't going to babysit people they didn't care about.
"Okay...deep breaths." Jayd the medic thought to himself, spreading his arms down in a stretch as he closed his eyes, taking in deep breaths through his mouth. He was lost in his own thoughts, his own world, oblivious to the others in the hallway. Within tubes connected to his hands shifted strange tiny glittering things, moving from his hands to his PAK. "First day of work. You can do this. You're chosen. Special. You will do this. YOU WILL DO THIS. You're going to be the best medic here."

"Okay, you've heard that "Senior" is a little bit...weird. But he's 421 years old. He's your taller. He's been doing this since before you were a fetus growing in a smeety tube. You can do this. YOU CAN DO THIS." A white-robed Irken with a vaguely fern-like set of antennae murmured as he nervously scratched his cheek with a claw. Feyr had never been on the Massive before, his "boss" had been the head Consular himself. This was all strange new territory.

"I hate my life." The service drone Maht muttered. It didn't matter if he was being forced to carry drinks on Irk or on the Massive. Demeaning work was demeaning work. How had he fallen so far? Whilst the others were still learning to SPELL THEIR NAME, he had been trained to conquer galaxies! That is, until the recoding...

Why, WHY had those dead janitorial drones ruined everything? He could have run. Why had he changed his mind? Why had he stayed with them until the last of their life ebbed and he was left to take the blame for their death?

"Yes, I hate your life too, inferior service drone." Dite the Elite said in a still, subdued monotone. He...she? It was so hard to tell. There was a faint flicker of amusement across the Elite's masked and armored face.

"Idiots. Locked in their own worlds. Are they even aware of what duties they face? Communications Officer Xeil inwardly groaned. Their first day of work and they were as frightened as smeets. They were Irkens! "Show some backbone, you skaatel!" She thought furiously, wishing SHE had psychic powers like the interrogator Feyr did.

The last one remained silent. Quiet. But an air of unmistakable amusement surrounded her as the guard smirked quietly, the first to turn as the doorway to the main control center of the Massive opened. The Tallest's glorious visage displayed upon the monitor as an Irken typed away at a computer console, standing up instead of sitting. He was a male Irken, who had very soft-looking green eyes and the outfit of a Communications Officer with his mask the same "Kelly Green" color of his chest and pants, though his arms and "shoulder" section were of a darker, more conservative shade of green. He wore a belt around his waist with several pouches, and upon seeing them, turned to the Tallest.

"These are the new recruits to our workstaff, my Tallest." He said, saluting.

"People we don't know or care about, meet person whom we barely care about who'll be showing you the ropes. We're off to go eat chips." Red said calmly, waving a dismissive hand in the air.

"And lots of cheese." Purple added as the feed was cut, the communications officer smiling gently as he spread his arms out.

"Well, it's good to see you all here! Call me "Senior", after my title. I'm Senior Communications Officer of the Massive."

He pulled down his face mask to show off his considerably bright and white smile. "And I want you
to consider me... your safety net."

BREAKING DAWN, PART ONE

I started this little "blog" on the day after the War of Light began. And I just want to admit it freely: I'm sorry.

I'm sorry that I couldn't do more. Sorry that I didn't try harder. So, so sorry that I was selfish, and put my own personal desires before doing what was right. I had a chance to stop this early, and I didn't take it because I didn't know any better.

I will carry that guilt with me forever. If I had only brought it to Earth sooner, then...

But it's too late for that. The coming of the Darkening Skies cannot be prevented, only confronted and beaten. And I'll do what I can.

I doubt any Irken would read this. They're too busy trying to fight for their lives. But if you're a human on Earth, you need to know how this happened, and why you have to find them, the ones who carry the rings.

I suppose I should begin the way all good stories do.

In the beginning...

The planet and capital of Irk. Tall, highly-developed, and above all, sickeningly pompous. The very planet could be summed up to it's core, it's spirit, by this city alone. It was not hard for the onlooker to see why: every single building that wasn't a skyscraper seemed to be packed full to the brim with Irkens, almost looking like metal sacks ready to explode from the inside, a smell of deep-fried food and heavy machinery tainting the air. The skyscrapers that impaled the dark orange-red sky above were the most noticeable thing: they radiated an arrogance, a desire to show off just how high and mighty they were, a challenge to the heavens...

Towers of Babylon. And with everyone speaking the same language.

"I! ME! MINE!"

"No, it's MINE!" A tall, armored insectoid-esque creature snapped, purple eyes glaring as he yanked the data pad from his near-identical "brother" of sorts, the only difference between the two being a color scheme in their armor that befitted their eyes: one was red, the other, as aforementioned, purple.

Guess what their names were. I'll give you a hint. They're named after colors.

"Fine, fine. YOU read the news." Red said in a condescending tone, tossing some nachos into his mouth and eagerly chewing with his mouth open and as loud as possible to drown Purple out as the Tallest of the Irken Empire, glorious co-leader along with Tallest Red, spoke to their Senior Communications Officer as their grand spaceship the Massive came to a halt over the Capital City of Irk.

"We're running out of gas and need to stock up for 24 hours. So this means shore leave." Purple said.

"We don't really care what you do with the 24 hours. Just so long as it's off the ship, this is the one time of the year where we don't have to look at you or listen to any of you and get to do...stuff. Private stuff."

"Uh, yes, sir, absolutely, I'll alert the rest of the crew that it's that time again." Senior Communications Officer of the Massive insisted, snapping to a salute as the Assistant
Communications Officer also saluted as well, nodding firmly.

"We'll not fail to have fun SIR!" Xeil shouted in her usual slightly grating tone.

"Oh, I LIKE you. Have I said that before? I'm saying it now." Purple told her, nodding as the feed cut out from their private rooms, leaving Senior and his assistant to turn to the others. Grinning broadly, Senior pulled down the mask cloth that covered his mouth beneath the space that would have been his "nose" had he been a human, and whistled with his gloved three-clawed hands, a button being brought over to him from a drawer by a coffee machine located by a radar graph.

A shiny RED button with little confetti painted on it. He immediately pressed it, and immediately wild and raucous music belted out from tiny speakers built into the device, Senior and the others racing through the ship, getting the word out.

And that word was...

"Paaaaaaaaarrrttyyyyyyy!" Feyr the Consular cheered as he gripped a horn-headed, grey-skinned alien prisoner by her arm and twirled her around, dancing with her across the cell she was stuck in and patting her on the head. "Shore leave at last! I'll be back in 24 hours to talk to you about those hidden weapons caches. If you feel like talking, good...I'll bring a souvenir, I think you'll really enjoy an embroidered pillow." He explained, pink eyes glittering like gems as his fern-like antennae stood up tall.

"Whatever." The Vortian prisoner mumbled as Feyr let go of her, waving cheerfully as he closed the cell again, heading down the small prison wing and past the Medical Bay, a black-eyed Irken in medical armor with a large red cross in front of his chest was rubbing his hands together, strange tubes stuck into them going back into the metallic vaguely backpack-like thing upon his, well, back! This was called a PAK, the life support system of an Irken, a "Swiss army knife" of goodies, and it was evidently feeding something vaguely glowing into the hands, which slightly pulsed with light.

"Heading down into town, Jayd?" Feyr asked in his high-pitched, almost feminine voice.

"Well, yes." Jayd said, grinning broadly. "I think some balloons and streamers and little chocolates will do wonders for the patients I'll be getting in the upcoming year. I know Tallest Purple really likes the use of them when I put some Adhesive Medical Strips on him after he gets into those scuffles with Tallest Red."

"Chocolates?"

"No. Balloons. He really likes sucking out the helium. Ya think maybe THAT'S why his voice?..." Jayd wondered, scratching his head as they made their way out of the medical wing, heading for the elevator.

"Always that odd...sound." An orange-eyed guard of the Massive murmured, arms folded as she put her jetpack backpack back on, the bulky thing making her grunt as she strained under it's square-like shape and weight. It looked almost like a Tetris block. Yes, she did, in fact, know what Tetris is, the same way some of the Irkens knew what a Swiss Army Knife was.

Irk had conquered, pillaged, ransacked and raped many a planet. But one planet they stayed away from because it was host to their greatest failure, their greatest threat, their greatest annoyance. This being named Zim had caused the death of two Tallests, plunged Irk into darkness, blown up an entire planet simply by scratching his behind, and did so many other things that if I were to put them into a list, it would stretch out of the room you're in and into a nearby hallway.
What was this planet? Earth. And out of morbid curiosity, there had been those who had found themselves secretly drawn to Earth...interacting with Earth...promoting Earth culture on a black-market that was growing in power through the Empire. Food recipes, clothing, entertainment, surprisingly, 32% of the Empire seemed to think Earth culture wasn't "totally inferior".

Speaking of one such member of the 32%...

"I'm walkin' on Sunshine...woaah-ohhh! I'm walkin' on Sunshine...woaah-ohhh! And tryin' to feel good!" Senior Communications Officer of the Massive said cheerily as he shook his booty through the air, bouncing it around, the rounded-square-shaped communications chips in the side of his head not relaying instructions from the Tallest or the mighty Control Brains, the power behind the throne, oh no. It was all Katrina and the Waves as he danced around the room, getting his belt on, ready to spend, spend, spend and get all the newest Earth music he could find.

It might have been a flaw in programming. Quite possibly, yes. The Irken PAK provided personalities to the Irken race from the moment of conception in the Smeet Factories, organic bodies filled with the whole of Irken Knowledge and traits that would, over time, cement where said smeet would be placed in an occupation.

It was possible that his PAK was defective, that he was in error in liking this music. A bit of code that might have jumped, or gotten jumbled...

Or perhaps it was simpler? After all, the personality chosen for him had been one of friendliness, concern, an eager-to-help and eager-to-please identity that was perfect for one in Communications...why wouldn't he like something that made him feel like patting people on the head?

A definite answer might not be easy to find, but the end result was simple: Senior loved Earth music, loved the way it made him feel, the way it seemed to flow through him, and it made the hard work on the Massive so much easier. He suspected his wards, to whom he was their safety net, had their own ways of coping with the jobs they had. Well, this was his, begun on his first shore leave after being exposed to it in a back alley in the capital.

Adjusting his silvery belt buckle, he plucked the white rose from the vase by his bed...his good luck charm, which always greased the wheels for him, somehow, in some way. When he had it on him, the Tallest never made him do "The Electric Chair", or unusual favors. Nobody ever yelled at him or acted insubordinate. He'd found it in an alley on Irk, that same alley he'd first heard Earth music and had followed it like the scent of bread lures those to a bakery.

Taking the white rose tenderly in his gloved hands, he tucked it safely in his "Kelly-Green" shirt and sauntered out of the room, continuing to sing. "Walkin' on sunshiiiiine...walkin' on sunshiiiiine..."

He almost bumped into service drone Maht, who blinked purplish eyes back at his taller, a tray held in his gloved hand. "Maht, you don't have to bring that, everyone on the Massive will be concerned only with stocking up, not with asking you for a drink."

"Every time I'm off planet, someone asks me to fetch them something. I'm just saving time." Maht said in his submissive, dejected one, eyes closing quietly as he pinched the space between his eyes with one gloved hand. His Taller's very soft green eyes gazed upon the many stains upon Maht's maroon uniform and rubbed his chin.

"Look, uh...what if you stay with me the whole time? I'll shop where you shop, and keep anyone from asking you to go peel them a grape or something." Senior offered.
"Oh, sir, I...I can't ask you to do that..." Maht murmured nervously, blushing deeply as he rubbed the back of his neck.

"NONSENSE, c'mon." Senior insisted, bringing him along, patting him on the back and yanking the tray out of Maht's hand, tossing it backwards onto the floor as Dite, Elite Guard of the Tallest rolled it's eyes, ignoring the two as it looked it's reflection over in the mirror of a nearby bathroom with an open door leading to the hallway. Yes, everything in order except the mask. A black-gloved hand reaching down to a red belt, past a secondary PAK upon his chest...a hand that was then held a mechanical-esque pentagonal mask over the Irken's lower face, the mask attaching itself via clamps. Dite was, at last, ready.

Indeed, all of them were. Making their way through the short-range teleporter system and the various little ships housed within the Massive's Docking Bay, Senior piloted a small shuttle down to the planet's surface, heading for the central shopping district. There were eighteen dozen stores selling useless junk and souvenirs alongside various convenience stores and, more importantly, surplus warehouses. It was to one of the back alleys located behind one such warehouse that Senior intended to reach today.

"23 hours left." Senior informed his little group. "Maht and I are taking a trip to Warehouse 13 and 14. I'd like all of us to meet back up at the food court in the East District. And remember..." Senior tapped the communications chip on the right side of his head, nodding at them all. "You can reach me through this via your communicators, you all know my frequency."

"Don't go talking to any skaatel you don't know." Xeil added cheerily with a bit of a giggle.

"The term is "off-worlder"." Feyr said with a cold growl. "Not "off-world filth", they are not all so inferior."

"Of course you'd say that, it is your job to get close to them, Consular Feyr." Dite mused with a faint laugh in his, or perhaps her, voice as he waved a claw in a circle by his head in a "you're crazy" gesture before they all headed off to get shopping, Senior walking by Maht, who's normally sunken features had actually begun to show some real hope.

"I almost never get any time to relax." Maht said. "Thank you for doing this for me, Senior sir."

Maht said again, shaking Senior's hand vigorously as they walked through the crowded streets of the capital city, Senior pointing at a nearby bar.

"Shall we go get YOU a drink for once?" He asked the service drone as they headed inside, pushing open a door with a very large and intimidating Irken skull insignia painted onto it in paint that was deliberately made fresh every single day to add a touch of class to the appearance of the bar.

Regrettably, "Barbone's Pub" had music blaring so loudly it was impossible to hear one's own thoughts. Sitting down at the bar in some stools, Maht and Senior sipped some of the few things most Irkens liked about Vortians: firewhisky. Pictures of the Tallest through the ages, be they Gor, Arnor, Spork even Splorchhammer, were proudly displayed, circling the bar above various signs that said things like "We Don't Bother Calling The Medics" and "The Most Endangered Species: Anyone Who Pisses Us Off". A bit of a harsh contrast, seeing the Tallest displayed in brave and noble portraits placed above insultingly violent proclamations below.

One such sign caught Maht's attention as he read it over. "The year was 1865, our land burnt to the ground, everything was lost, I took my stand. I rode through fire and rode through fog, Irken flag within my hand, fighting for the Empire, fighting for my Land...FTW?" Maht blinked. "Who's FTW?" He asked a brutish-looking guard that gave him a look like he was gum underneath his shoe.
"Who's asking?"

"Nobody special." Maht said immediately.

"I am." Senior wanted to know, looking the thick-bodied, brown-eyed Irken over. The man was obviously used to violence. Why was he speaking to an Irken who looked like his first name should be "Nazi"? Simple: the jerk was looking down on one of his wards. Nobody did that. NOBODY. He didn't even let the Tallest get away with that. Granted, that got him in trouble and made him get punished, but still...

"It means "F—k The World." The gorilla of an Irken explained calmly. "You're clearly from off-planet. How many times a year are you actually on Irk? Seeing all that happens? You...I swear..." He shook his head back and forth, the other residents of the bar looking on nervously, others in anticipation. "Idiots flyin' up there in your little ships, removed from how life REALLY is down here. Thank the Tallest there's still people standing up for the old ways, the rest are filthy melkrema, traitors all! Off-worlder culture, PAH!" He spat on the ground at the mere idea of it.

"Yeah! Earth culture, PFFT! Vrik na tshanti!" Another Irken agreed, waving a mug of beer in the air. "Those offworlder-loving traitors waste their time wearin' cowboy hats, watching cartoons and playin'...TETRIS."

"TETRIS!" The whole bar spat on the ground.

"Maybe we should make like a tree and LEAF." Senior whispered to Maht as the gorilla of an Irken sneered at Maht, who was quivering nervously.

"Y'know I s—t out a turd that was bigger n' you this morning." He told Maht. "Question is...do I beat the s—t outta you right here and now for sidin' with someone that's so obviously a melkrema, or do I let it slide?"

"You are drunk, sir. You're saying things you don't even realize you're saying." Maht muttered. In the old days he would have kicked the drunkard squarely upside the head and taught him a lesson. But now...

The brute reached for Maht to rip his arm off. Senior immediately grabbed the man's hand, slammed it down onto the table and pulled out something from a holster in his belt...an Earth weapon. Something he bought for several reasons. One, it had been a two for one deal. Two, whilst most Irken armor was resistant to plasma, it was NOT resistant to melee-esque weaponry, or metallic bullets. And three, and of this he was sure...when he shot people with it...

BANG!

It hurt a whole lot more.

The Irken screamed and bellowed, waving his shot-through hand in the air, gasping in horror as Senior put the gun in the holster, waving a dismissive goodbye as he led Maht outside the bar. "I'd go call a Medic now if I were you. Break tradition." He called back cheerily, heading for Warehouse 13...

Unaware that the "rose" tucked away, hidden in his shirt was slightly glowing for a moment, a repeating rhythm beginning to fill Senior's lack of ears as they reached the warehouse, Maht looking over various surplus bags of gumballs, his favorite snack, his taller situated across from him, examining large blocks of cheese.
Senior blinked. First the rhythm, now he was hearing a word. What was that word? It sounded like-

"Did you hear something?" Senior inquired, looking at Maht, who blinked in surprise back at his commanding officer.

"No, why?" Maht wanted to know, confused. "Do you want me to hear something, sir?"

"No, no, it's fine." Senior insisted, waving his hand in the air as he put several blocks of cheese in a shopping basket, as gold as the walls around them in the stylishly-lit warehouse.

Okay, that time he knew what he'd heard. "Life"? Where was it coming from?

He then noticed it. A glow on his chest. Eyes wide in surprise, he ran for the nearest bathroom before anyone could notice, locking the door behind him, gazing down at the glowing region of his shirt, his heart. Realizing what it most likely was, he reached into his shirt, removing the white rose as it pulsed with strange light, bathing him in warmth...

"Did you just...speak?" He asked. "...look at me, I'm talking to a rose..."

I am more. I have watched you for some time. You're not as bad as the others, little bug. No, no. Within you...lies a concern for the lives of others. Thus, I am choosing you, now at the moment of the Great Dawn...choosing you to be my avatar. You'll simply have to do.

"Have to...do? BUG?" Senior asked, an offended look flickering across his face.

The other Entities have begun to make their appearance, and all will choose their avatar. I who stand for Life, am choosing you. You shall fight for me for the sake of your kind. And if you fail, your people will die.

Senior's eyes widened as the rose suddenly transfigured into a large, white lantern, brimming with power. He held it up, transfixed by its shimmering light, awe and wonder filling his eyes. The words were frightening, and yet there was no cruelty, no menace behind them. The being that spoke through this lantern was trying to be kind, a parent explaining an important but solemn duty to a child.

I want to prevent that. No matter how I DESPISE your kind's actions...I do not want you dead...any of you. Certainly not at the hands of the other Entities. So I ask you now...do you wish to save your world? Your people?

Light began to siff out of the White Lantern, light of so many shades, spilling out and swirling around the Irken communications officer as he found himself flooded with something...a power the likes of which he'd only tasted before, briefly, as he listened to the songs that filled him with joy. In a few moments it was as if his eyes, so long held quietly tight, were being pened. He, who had been dead so long, was finally alive...

"...what...are you doing? This...this feels wonderful..." Senior whispered. "I...I'm alive. I'm alive. Will...will I feel like this all the time if...if I help you?"
EVERYONE will feel like this.

"...yes..." Senior gasped happily, brimming with joy. "Oh, yes, YES!" He cheered. "I'll do it!"

And with that, the White Lantern shone like a brilliant star, transforming into a million points of light that seeped into Senior's body like a mist, the Irken feeling the presence of a being fare more magnificent and above any Irken as a star was above a grain of sand. Now he was host to the protector of Life.

Host to Sude, last of the Seraphi race...his new lord and God.

Destiny awaits...
Rage of the Forgotten Ones

Breaking Dawn, Part Two
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RAGE OF THE FORGOTTEN ONES

If you're reading this, then again...thanks. I'm glad somebody bothered to check out my blog. I'm surprised you're checking it now, though. Shouldn't you be more concerned with the fact that hundreds of planet Earths are floating around in the sky above, defying all physics? Even the average ignorant idiot can tell: something is seriously wrong.

And I know you want to know how this happened. Maybe you heard about me. Remembered I was the "crazy kid" for a long time, that I had all of these "insane" theories about aliens and the supernatural, and now that this is happening, well, you turn to me for answers. I've got answers, alright...I've got answers.

It all ties back...to him. To an alien named Zim.

His species is called the Irken race. They're like reptile-esque bugs. Their bodies are organic shells, their REAL selves are attached to their backs in robotic backpacks called "PAKS". They're generally proud, vain, narcissistic, selfish, dangerous, in a word...evil. I knew from the moment Zim entered my classroom in his pathetic disguise that fooled everyone but me that he was bad news, I swore to expose him.

But something happened over the years. Zim and I began to...

Well...

...I can't call it friendship. I really can't. It's like...we were rivals. And we always wanted to stay that way. To outdo each other. It was a "same time next week" kind of deal we had: he'd try to make some world-enslaving or world-destroying plot...I'd stop him. It was a great game we played. And I think we began to develop...well...a kind of respect...a kind of trust. We kinda mellowed, in a sense. Heck, we even applied to the same colleges. I guess that my life fell into a rhythm I intended to ride for the rest of my life.

...but before all that happened, there was...a period that I think back on with shame. It was kind of like the turning point. When we looked back on what we did, something changed in us. I think we kinda were forced to change.

See...I wasn't the only one who knew Zim was an alien. My sister knew, but she didn't really care much. Zim had another Irken living at his home, named Skoodge, but Skoodge wasn't really too much of a threat. He wasn't actually too bad, as far as Irkens went. But I did tell my classmate Gretchen about Zim, and I think she wanted to believe me.

And then there was Nick.

Nice kid from down south. Slightly annoying accent. But friendly. Helpful. And Zim had experimented on him before. Made him REAAAALLY happy with this strange device he stuck in his head. Twice. I asked him for help, knowing he knew the truth.
I TRIED to train him. I really did. I tried to help him get smart and savvy the way I was. We planned...we calculated...a few missions went by, we did well.

He wasn't my friend, but...but he was a good comrade. Yes...a comrade. And that day, on March 23rd, six years ago...Zim did the worst thing he'd ever done.

And he did it to Nick.

...I own that. Because he was my soldier. My comrade.

...my fault.

I don't know if he...remembers it all. I kept wondering "Was he afraid? Was he begging for me to save him in his head? Was he crying all the while as Zim..."

Now I know how he felt. I'm feeling that way too. Because someone forced a very dangerous, very powerful ring on me. A ring that can turn the imagination into reality. Chosen for me because I can overcome great fear.

And yet...

All I want to do now...

Is SCREAM.

At first...it was a spiritual experience. Exhilarating. Almost transcendental. He felt invincible. He felt...like he could face anything. Anyone. Dib Membrane wasn't afraid of anything or anyone, and he knew, in that first few moments he KNEW he could have taken on the entire world and WON. For those first few moments...the ring upon his finger showed him a world just in front of his fingertips, a world of potential.

And then...then it was not HIS will that controlled the power. It felt like he was being tugged around by slimy strings, his flesh was not his own...he was lost in his own spirit...and he knew what was at fault.

"Get this thing OFF me!" Dib yelled out, yanking on the white ring on his finger as best he could, gasping as the Irken with the golden eyes looked on in pitiless amusement. Two sets of antennae, one teal, one black slightly raised in amusement with gloved hands and a blue vest across his chest, with dark blue pants and boots of black...black to match the gloves...black to match his heart. "GET IT OFF!"

"It's no use." The Irken with the golden eyes said, waving his hand in the air. "I was the first one to touch the Exemplar Ring you wear on your hand. It might be powered by your Will, it might think you're using it, but really...it's MY will that matters now. It might as well be on my hand. And you're going to do everything I tell you to do. You won't have a choice." The Irken said.

Dib's sister bellowed angrily, punching the ground below and seething, frothing at the mouth. Unlike Dib, who was dressed in a fine outfit of black and green, she was all red and black, with a form that looked vaguely machine-like in it's design, a fury dripping off her facial features as the Irken snapped his fingers and she panted slightly, slowly calming down.

"You...fix us...NOW." Dib snarled angrily, summoning up all his willpower, leveling the ring on his
finger squarely at the Irken. "You FREAK."

"The NAME...is Zerinim Two Jookiba." The Irken with two sets of antennae said, putting one gloved hand on his chest before growling fervently, a burning red fiery blaze of energy forming in his hands, sizzling like he was holding a miniature sun in his palms. "But don't call me "Two" like my closest loved ones do. Call me...MASTER."

He immediately launched the wave of energy squarely at Dib and Gaz, knocking them to the ground, Gaz taking a blow to the head, unconsciousness settling in as Dib felt the thing's grip on him relaxing, and now the many sledgehammers he kept imagining should be beating into this thing actually manifested in a bright green glow, energy constructs that struck at Two over and over as Dib kept the manifestation up, intent on one thing and one thing alone...

MAKING...HIM...PAY.

"I'm gonna make you sorry you ever came to my planet!" Dib yelled out, stepping closer and closer to Two as the Irken held his gloved hands forth, a sonic blast of red construct energy knocking Dib back as Two snapped his fingers, a surge of power rising from his form as a bow popped into his gloved hands. Dib jumped back up, quickly firing off blasts of energy from his ring like a cowboy desperately firing his pistols at an oncoming posse, but Two calmly stood still, the blasts missing him as he notched an arrow of burning red.

It launched through the air, impaling Dib through his left side and he screeched in pain, falling to the ground as his grip on his body faded, and he swam in and out of consciousness, struggling to stay awake, Two chuckling coldly as he approached the human and his sister.

"Ahhhhh, I NEEDED that. I'm in a such good mood right now...now you go home and power down and get some rest. Dream peacefully...it'll be the last happy sleep you ever have, I'm afraid." The Irken said, kneeling by Dib and lifting his head with one claw. It wasn't a mocking tone...it just said it. A statement of fact. Nothing personal. "You've got a busy day tomorrow, after all." He added with a slight smile, clapping his hands as Dib and Gaz found themselves returning to their normal clothes, getting back up and returning inside the house of their own accord, the will of their master, the being named Two, echoing in their minds...

Mercifully, Dib could feel his wounds healing. But this was cold comfort. All Dib could think about...was what this thing was going to do the world he loved.

...  

...  

...  

...as Dib rested in his bed, snuggling up beneath the covers, shivering slightly, he grit his teeth and grounded them together. He was mad. He was furious. He couldn't even fall asleep without feeling like that...that thing with the double set of antennas was watching him. It had loosed it's control over them...just barely. It was allowing them to rest, but that was cold comfort considering Dib knew the thing would be up to no good.

What would it do to his world? What would it make him do to his world? What would it make him do to the people he loved?
Simply trying to imagine talking to his father or anybody else about what had happened was giving him a headache...no doubt another part of that being, "Two", inflicting his will on him. What would happen if he actually tried to tell his father what had occurred, get him to simply analyze the ring that he was unable to take off? Would it be some "Battle Royale" kind of deal? Would a collar manifest around his neck and take his head off?

Gaz. What was Gaz thinking, Dib wondered as his eyelids slowly beginning to drop, genuine sleep mercifully setting in. Was she scared? Was she indignant about being used? Or was she just...angry?

Well, as it turned out, Gaz was none of those things. She had long since fallen deep asleep to dream of a world that shaped and shifted by her will, brought to life by a giant red pen, floating upon a rubber piggy and laughed giddily at the new world she was making. She liked seeing things in red...yes, yes, she wanted to paint everything in red...

She knew this power would help her do it. She was aware it was bringing out her most violent desires and attitudes. But she knew she could channel it. She just had to wait for her chance.

She could take control of this. She could prove stronger than the thing on her finger. "That idiot thinks he has me. But I've beaten worse things before." Her dream-self said as she raised a chainsaw high, cutting through a swath of imaginary Twos. "AND YOU'LL FALL, JUST LIKE THE REST OF THEM!"

... ...

"Oh great. Two is here. Help me put my clothes back on."

"Why did you ask me to bring HER along? I could understand Lilo, but..."

"I want her to understand what we're...willing to do to break her. Lilo, do you know HOW the Minor Arcana was formed? How the...application process is undertaken?"

"..."

"Well, in exchange for very, VERY large amounts of power and the ability to remain eternally young...you've got to kill family. Close family. One member, to be precise."

"Samael approached me and told me that if I wanted into the Minor Arcana...if I wanted the ability to be immune to control and to control reality, I'd have to kill a family member."

"No, please tell me you didn't...didn't kill them...Kila, Zim, you...you didn't?"

"No, of course I couldn't, I...I love my parents. I...I chose Green, my sister from the past."

"If Kila and Zim ARE your parents, the ones I know so well, then they would have been horrified at the idea of you working for the person who made them suffer so much! They wouldn't have raised you to be so cruel!"
"They didn't raise me to be cruel, but we never could stay in one place long...do you know how some kids move around city after city, state after state, never really making friends, or worse, constantly leaving the friends they DO have? For me...it was TEN TIMES WORSE. I had to move from world to world and whenever we got REMOTELY settled into the hotel or other temporarily dwelling, we had to leave! Working for Samael meant he wouldn't hunt my parents anymore and... It's not like I know Green. She's my sister and I understand mentally that the whole thing is...sad."

"..."

"I OUGHT to know her. I should have spent my childhood with my big sister being there, we should have blown stuff up in the backyard together or played gorka-ball or "Toss the GIR"...we should have been siblings but...but we weren't. Aren't. It IS sad, but...I just don't really know her, and so I don't have many qualms about killing her, though MIYU had NO qualms in killing MALIK! And to get to her mother, she killed her dad too!"

""Azazel has yet to kill Nick, his dear, beloved Grandfather. So perhaps he'll kill his originator instead, he was so close to Nick, In his reality, his "Pee-Paw" was so PROUD of him...he even gave him his."

"..."

"As for Frequency, lobotomizing Sari, whom he cared for greatly, was his act. Samael was happy to allow him to do the act, it allowed Miyu to replace Sari, who had refused to kill her parents and had taken Samael's gift of immortality. Such a pity...she would have gained Miyu's incomparable battle skills but instead she lost most of her brain."

"And now let us come to the point. You are not going to be rescued. You are going to be tortured here by us, one at a time, and when TWO finishes with you, I...will begin."

"Question: Who shall start?"

"I'll be the first...my power will be good for torturing you-"

With that, Dib awoke from the strange dream. It had felt real. FAR too real. And that person...Two. It had definitely been him. What was going on? Were Two's memories of the past somehow crisscrossing with his slave's head? Possible, he supposed. The Irken could control him from his head, but that meant his mind was open, at least when asleep, to Dib's own...

How strange...

"How odd..." Dib mumbled as he scratched his head, sweeping his legs out of his bed and onto the floor as he made his way to his bureau to get his usual attire out. Dark jacket? Check. Blue t-shirt with a "Meh" face on it? Check. Dark pants? Also check. Glasses...shoes...belt for said pants...check, check, check-

"...is the ring still on my finger?" Dib mumbled, looking down at his hand.

Check.

"...crap." He muttered. "You JERK." He growled, turning his head to look out the window at a cheerily grinning Two, who pushed the window open, letting in the sunshine to the dark blue walls of Dib's cluttered-up bedroom.
"Nice place, it really is...except for the smell." Two admitted as he looked around the bedroom. Indeed, over the years Dib had gotten slightly more advanced equipment from his father for birthday presents...yes, Birthday. Dib's father refused to celebrate Christmas due to his undying hatred of Santa Claus, so he always wasted that day searching for signs of Santa. And beating up Santa's Helpers in the street. Yeah, it was weird.

A sophisticated computer system on a desk with what appeared to be three dozen drawers, many of them stuffed full of papers on Bigfeet, ghosts and aliens...a pile of laundry in the corner, all dark clothes, blue t-shirts...and several dozen paranormal posters littered the walls, including one of a flying saucer. And not just ANY flying saucer. "Is that from the X-Files series?" Two found himself asking, an intrigued expression coming to his features.

"Yes, the original one. I got it off of Ebay. Cost me two month's allowance too." Dib added, not taking his eyes off the alien scumbag. He wanted to jump through the air and do a karate kick to his head, hey, years of fighting with Zim meant he'd picked up a couple of tricks. But no, no, it was like he was rooted to the spot, and he knew EXACTLY why.

He tried to yank the ring off anew...hopeless. Two chuckled slightly as he snapped his fingers. "I used to watch the show when I was younger. Ahhhh, memories. Moving from dimension to dimension it's still nice to see that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Wait until I tell you about the second movie."

"Second movie?!!" Dib remarked, blinking stupidly.

"Oh, right, you don't know. Guess this world will never see it once I'm...well..." He chuckled coldly. "Once WE'RE finished. Go on, my little puppet. Eat breakfast. Say goodbye to your father with your sister. Then we begin, and I think I'll start by doing you a favor, and doing what all children dream of doing at one point or another...burning down your school."

"Why would you want to do that?!" Dib growled angrily, fingers clenching almost like claws, eyes alit with fury. "What could you POSSIBLY gain from-"

"Do I look like a Bond Villain, my boy? I'm not TELLING you." The Irken chuckled. "But I'm in a good mood, so being the nice person I am, here's the deal. You get until Lunch Period's over. Then I'll take full control...and have you and your sister burn down the school and everyone and everything in it."

The Irken was suddenly up in Dib's face, smiling coldly, one hand gripping his chin, the other tapping Dib's ring. "You have until then to convince the others to get out, and don't bother trying to use your ring to convince them, I'll put it under a lock that won't open until it's time to BURN, baby, BURN." The Irken laughed. "Hey, you've been failing to get your classmates to listen for years. Maybe today's the day they'll finally listen!"

"You don't have to do this." Dib said, trying another tack, remembering the dream. Normally he wouldn't EVER negotiate with an alien, not even try, but...this was different. "You don't need to hurt anyone."

"But I do." Two whispered, raising his gloved claws up and clenching them. "...I DO."

Letting off cold-hearted laughter, the Irken jumped back out of the window, strolling off. Dib cursed under his breath. This was one of the few times an alien was out in the open! NO disguise! Why,
WHY was nobody outside? Or LOOKING outside? What had their attention? Were they all still ASLEEP?

"So then he shot her, it was weird." The newest arrival on the "Okrah" show said to the titular host, Gaz munching on some cereal as the tall and weirdly surreal Prof. Membrane adjusted the goggles over his eyes, looking at the screen.

"This PULP is what the people are interested in?" He inquired.

"Yeeeeeep." Gaz said nonchalantly through a mouthful of "Choco Frosted Sugar Bombs".

"And it's on every morning from 8 to 9? Without fail?"

"Yeeeeeeeep."

"...what next, dancing panda bears?" Prof. Membrane mused sarcastically, rolling his eyes as he poured himself some coffee. He was getting better at this, he TRIED to be there during the day for breakfast if nothing else. And to think, it only took him a little over 10 years to actually start being somewhat of a good father figure.

"Mornin', Dad." Dib said, entering the kitchen and going to the fridge before shrinking away. Every time he tried to open the fridge, weird things happened. Last time he was SURE he'd heard a sneeze, and the mayonnaise had started yelling "The ketchup did it! The ketchup!". And ANOTHER time his father had left an experiment in there. Something had been living in the fridge.

"...is...the thing still in there?" Dib asked Prof. Membrane, inching away from the fridge and reaching for the knife drawer by the sink, pulling out a large carving knife as Gaz watched with interest.

"No, I'm fairly certain I moved him to the freezer." Prof. Membrane said, shaking his head back and forth. Smiling in relief, Dib wiped his brow and opened up the fridge...and was then forced to hack back several dozen tentacles before slamming the fridge shut. "Or maybe I forgot. Who keeps track?" Prof. Membrane added a moment later, putting a gloved finger to where his lip might have been...it was hard to tell, the white labcoat that he wore had a loooong collar that reached up high. You couldn't even see his nose!

"I'll just make some toast."

"SUPER-Toast?" Prof. Membrane asked expectantly.

"...er, I was thinking cinna-" Dib began to say, before he saw his father's slowly drooping expression. "SUPER-Cinnamon Toast." He quickly changed his mind, nodding enthusiastically.

"EXCELLENT choice, my son!" Prof. Membrane agreed, clapping Dib on the shoulder and moving to the cupboard to get the cinnamon sugar for his boy. "I can only spare 110 more seconds but I'd be HAPPY to get your cinnamon toast started!"

"...thanks, Dad." Dib said quietly. "I...I really appreciate it. And...appreciate you." He murmured.

"What will that thing make me do to the ones I love?" He thought sadly to himself, sitting in the chair next to Gaz as she quietly looked over at him, a faint flicker of genuine regret passing over her face for an instant.
...the Beautiful Angel clutched his mother's paw, looking down at her closed eyes. She looked so...worn and tired. So sad...so lost...so forgotten. She was a sad little doll that had been tossed into a closet to be forgotten about. She lay there in the ornately-draped bed inside of the crystalline palace that hovered high above the clouds, hidden from all sight not by ignorance on behalf of humanity, but by carefully-constructed machinations, creations of Zerinim Two, and of the robot that calmly watched, her face solemn before she turned her red-helmed head away from the sight of her beloved kneeling by his dying mother.

"C'mon...just a few more days, momma." He whispered, his golden/amber eyes gazing down upon his beloved mother. "...just a few more days and maybe we can end all of this...get our world back...and bring all of us back to normal."

"Is she...any better? Any worse?"

The Angel looked up. Zerinim Two's face was normally a window...behind his eyes you could tell he was barely suppressing a furious rage within. Now that window was cracked, but not showing rage...but deep, deep concern and sadness...

Personal loss...one of the greatest causes of rage in the world.

"No. And...and I've been talking with her and...she kept asking about the plan." The Angel went on, sighing as he stood up, brushing his thick slightly-light-brown locks of hair back. "You know that this base Earth is very...unstable. It's got the seeds of potential for all the other stories, but if this plan works, I'm worried what'll happen to the other."

"Who GIVES a rat's ass?!" Two snapped angrily, cutting his hand in the air to shut him up. "Azzy, these people are awful. AW-FUL. I might have been petty and selfish but when it came down to it, I ALWAYS put doing what was right for the ones I loved and for the world I loved at the forefront! Do you think ANY of the so-called "cornerstones" of this Base Earth would?!"

"...I don't know." The Beautiful Angel admitted softly, honestly. "...I'd like to believe that some of them would."

"I'm sorry that "some of them" isn't enough." Two spoke quietly, folding his arms. "You know...I saw into Dib's mind when I controlled him. He has a family. He has a father. He has a sister. And his life's been slowly getting better for the past five years. Zim getting more considerate, Gaz becoming more tolerant, his father's actually eating BREAKFAST with them!"

That made the woman in the bed chuckle slightly. "Brekkie? N-no kiddin'? Ame kef, never thought he'd actually..." Her chuckling dissolved into pained coughs as she held her paw over her mouth and Two gently patted her forehead. "I'm...sorry I'm so friggin' useless now."

"It'll be alright, maneem." Two whimpered, kneeling by his mother and kissing her paw as a blue-furred being entered, Two rubbing his eyes as he left the room. The blue-furred being took off his cap, letting his hair fall down as he nervously chewed his lip, gazing at his aunt.
"...are we really gonna go through with this? I want the world back but..." He sighed. "...what he's making Dib do isn't...it isn't right."

"I want you to have this." The Beautiful Angel said, giving the blue-furred bounty hunter a pad of paper he had in a pack slung around his shoulder. "It's notes that mother took. I've read it five dozen times..." He trailed off, taking his mother's paw again.

The blue-furred being chewed his lip again, walking out of the room as he went to stand on a balcony, reading the journal as the robot stepped out on the balcony to join him.

"I shall be meeting with MY personal inductees today." She said in her emotionless tone, holding up the rings she would be using. "They shall join my Corps and I will then bring the two up here so that they may understand why we do what we do. I think he would go along with it anyway...a chance to destroy this world? Have "fun"? How could he say "no"?"

"Will you bother to tell him that once enough of this world's been destroyed by the Cornerstones, he'll get folded into the historical fabric?" The bounty hunter wanted to know.

"That's on a "need-to-know" basis." The robot said, a flicker of amusement passing over her metallic features as she sauntered back into the crystalline palace, leaving the bounty hunter alone on the balcony as he reached into his pocket, pulling out two small rings of his own. One was shining slightly, a chosen partner found, but the other...it's light was dull.

"...why isn't it lit up? What's it missing? WHO is it missing? I can't do this alone..." He murmured, putting them back in his pocket, his paw going over the journal to his side, over an entry stained by teardrops.

... ... ...

...Dib nervously gripped his pants pockets as he looked out the window of the bus, sitting in the back with Gaz as she looked over at him. "Any ideas?" She asked sarcastically.

"...I thought about offering twenty bucks to everyone to leave school right after lunch...but my allowance isn't THAT high." Dib admitted, pulling out his wallet and opening it, a tiny moth fluttering out as Gaz rolled her eyes.

"And just TELLING them the truth won't help either, will it?" She asked. "They'd never believe you. Well, they might if you tried to use that thing in front of them, but-"

"It's not working." Dib mumbled, shaking his fist angrily, the ring uselessly dull. "I'm trying and trying...but he meant it...he shut it off. And after lunch, it turns on...and I turn into a living weapon. He'll drive me like I'm a BATTLEBOT."

Gaz looked around the bus, eyes narrowing darkly. ".Dib...what's wrong with this picture?" She asked quietly, dangerously.

Dib looked up from his lap, glancing around.
"Notice anything...missing?"

Suddenly it hit him. Zim. Skoodge. Gretchen. Nick. All four of them were gone. How strange...how very, very strange...

The bus came to a stop as everyone headed into the school, their new guidance counselor greeting the children at the door. He saw Dib's clearly sullen expression and his gentle green eyes softened. A hand reached out, placed squarely on Dib's right shoulder. "Dib, is something the matter?" Mr. Thildari inquired, one eyebrow raised high over a head with perfectly-combed grey hair.

"...nothing you could help with, sir." Dib told him as Gaz headed inside. "You've been more help than the last guidance counselor I had, but...you can't help me with this."

"Aww, why not try me?" Mr. Thildari asked, moving Dib inside and sitting him down at a bench by a water fountain. "First period bell doesn't ring for seven..." He checked his watch. "...six whole minutes!"

"...I need to get everyone out of the school before lunch. And I mean EVERYONE. Even that creepy janitor." Dib told the guidance counselor, leaning back in the chair, Two's smirk lingering in his mind. "Or else something terrible is going to happen."

"Dib, did a friend of yours say they're going to blow up the school?" The guidance counselor wanted to know, his darkened skin paling slightly.

Dib's eyes went wide.

There it was... 

...hope. Why hadn't he seen it before? It was such a simple solution.

"Yes, yes." Dib said fervently. "...except he's not really a friend, he...he said he was going to blow the whole school sky-high after lunch period, Mr. Thildari." Dib informed the guidance counselor, shaking him by his shoulders, back and forth, back and forth.

The guidance counselor looked deep into Dib's eyes, mouth becoming a taut line as if "reading" him. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully before closing his green eyes and letting out a soft, long sigh. "I believe you." He told Dib. "I'll inform the principal and vice principal about this, and I'll have everyone escorted out of the building until the police can search the grounds."

Dib inwardly cheered for joy as Mr. Thildari stood up and headed for the staff wing, punching the air as he headed off to class. He won. He'd WON.

Or at least...so he thought.

"I should have KNOWN you'd cheat." Two muttered furiously, sitting in a tree outside of school, his fists clenching tightly as red energy swirled off his body like sparks off a fire as his own ring swirled around him like a tiny fly, buzzing, buzzing.

"Calling in help like that, you great big cheater...well, you're about to find out that I'm just as petty and immature as you, Dib Membrane..." The Irken chuckled darkly. "I suppose the saying's true. If you want something done right..."
He hopped down from the tree, making his way towards the school as red energy seeped off his body, his footprints leaving behind burning indents within the ground as he chuckled coldly.

"You have to do it yourself."
Rise of the Red Helm

She was a normal, good soldier. She truly was.

But she couldn't help but notice something wasn't...right...with her world.

She saw things...tolerated. Things that she could not stand. And she grew to despise these things. She didn't understand why they existed.

Until she met it. The crack. The rip. The Schism.

As she looked into it, knowledge ripped through her mind like a tidal wave, and she understood all. Understood what she was. Where she was. What she was meant to be.

And she realized now why she could not tolerate those things. Those...vermin.

She swore to destroy them.

They were all nothing more than robotic bugs.

And she...was going to make sure...everybody knew this.

Breaking Dawn, Part Three
RISE OF THE RED HELM

The experience was...enlightening beyond anything he'd ever experienced. Simultaneously intoxicating and exhilarating, a breath of fresh air after years, YEARS of being locked away in the damp and the dark, beautiful...so damn beautiful.

And then that experience ended, and he was vaguely aware of a spectral, ghostly form gently patting him on one shoulder, a smile spreading across a draconic face with sweet, kindly eyes, black with a faint tint of green at the bottom, and pupils like a shining star. It spread it's wings over him, his Lord, his God, speaking in a voice so harmonious that the very words uttered from its mouth threatened to annihilate his very existence with their divinity. He was standing in the presence of sacred fire, and like Zeus before the average mortal, it was a wonder he could endure it and wasn't being burnt up.

"You're different...from most of the others." It told him. "...I think I could tolerate you more. You've got the seeds of real potential in you, my host. Are you prepared?"

"P-prepared f-for what?" Senior asked, stuttering nervously as Sude smiled broadly.

"I have need of you for a mission. I'll hide away within you...be only visible TO you, audible to you. Return to your charge, the once called Maht. I'll explain when you've returned to the ship you call your home." Sude informed him, wrapping his immense wings and powerful arms around him, almost sinking into his body. Senior gasped, patting his chest, his stomach, his arms...

The Irken in him was astounded, frightened, confused. This being wasn't an Irken! It was skaatel, it was...

Yet...the power...the sheer, awe-inspiring beauty that had filled his form...that had been more
enjoyable than anything he'd ever felt. He'd felt tiny doses of it, listening to Earthen music...those quiet moments from the past with the two beings he had loved, were he capable of love. Pure happiness...that was it. Unbridled joy.

He WANTED to feel that again, above all else. And if he did what this thing asked of him, he might be able to feel it again. He would have done ANYTHING to feel it.

So he exited the restroom, heading back in Maht's direction as the service drone helped somebody back up from the ground, they'd tripped and had dropped all of their merchandise and Maht was putting it back in their cart for them. "You're very helpful, sir." The half-Irken, half-Vortian admitted as Senior stood by Maht, who nodded cheerily at the Vortken.

Senior nervously gulped. He didn't REALLY have anything personal against ANY Vortians or other species. His PAK had, after all, been encoded in a time when other species had been allies to the Empire, when it had been considerably less bullying, conquering not with cruelty, but with a kiss, a time when all the Irken race had wanted was for all beings to speak Irken, know Irken culture, trade with Irk, and it wasn't like there weren't perks to this...

Still, he was slightly...uncomfortable around half-breeds, or "mongrels". Most Irkens had sexual organs deeply embedded, useless like a human appendix. Stored deep inside, never to be used. Ignored. What crazy lunatics would undergo the procedure to bring those organs out and...and breed with other beings? It seemed so...barbaric!

He tried to summon up a smile and gave a half-hearted chuckle at the Vortken as he turned to Maht, pointing at an invisible watch on his wrist. "Methinks it's time we find the others and meet up for lunch. Let's head to the food district."

Making their way out of the warehouse and through the streets, Maht examined a magazine he'd bought, entitled "Irken Weekly". The headlines were quite attention-grabbing. "Resisty Rocks: Irken Resistance Movement gains in the Polls Through Popular Programming", "How to style your lekku"-

EWWWW. People could PIERCE that part of the body? YECCCH.

Wait. What was this? "The Red Helm Strikes Again".

Red Helm? Senior frowned. He'd heard reports about this "Red Helm" lately, this vigilante being that stalked the streets of Irk. People had a tendency to DIE if they crossed his path. Die horribly. Most of the time nobody was able to find all of the pieces of whatever poor soul had met the Red Helm in some dark, dingy alley. The only thing the victims had in common seemed to be that they had all been members of the Irken military.

What neither Maht nor Senior knew was that several miles away, in an underground bunker, Irken commanders of the local military were all discussing their latest problems, which could be summed up quite easily in one sentence.

"HE'S KILLING EVERYONE!"

Fists slammed onto a table as dozens of armed guards stood by the exits below a catwalk, the commanders sitting around a circular table. The Irken who'd shouted shook his slightly hexagonal head back and forth. "I had thought that we'd be able to put a lid on the media...why are they being allowed to report this?"
"We've TRIED, sir, but they keep moving locations. And word-of-mouth is spreading the news about the Red Helm like wildfire."

"You called us here because you've got a plan, haven't you?" Another commander asked, one of nearly black skin, eyes steely and cold as he steepled his gloved claws.

"No, I did not." The man from before mumbled, folding his arms and leaning back in his chair, scowling behind his Elite mask. "I thought it was you. You've lost five officers, haven't you?"

"Today it makes six. SIX! Some of my best people."

"Oh, screw this." Another captain spoke up, standing up from the chair. "I'm done here. You brain donors wanna stick around-"

"Siddown, Captain Kroonch." A low, growling voice snarled out from atop the catwalk, as a being stepped out into the light, resting black-gloved hands upon the railing. It was a being dressed in black and red armor, a large red breastplate upon his chest with two spiky wings hanging low from his shoulder blades, with a horned helm. Two curled down the side of it's head like a ram, with a final spike jutting up from the forehead. It appeared as though the Red Helm had decided to make a personal appearance, and he was every bit as imposing as they'd heard.

His soulless red eyes blazed down at them as they felt a faint smile make it's way through the helmet that covered his head. "You've all authorized a recent...campaign. A secret one. Targeting defectives. You thought nobody would find OUT?!" He growled. "Nobody reports the death of poor defectives. But poor soldiers dying in the line of duty? Oh, THAT sells."

"You ASKING to die?!" The dark-skinned commander snarled. "There are easier ways of doing it!"

"Yeah, like yelling at the lunatic that's eviscerated every single military idiot he's come across with his hands alone." The Red Helm laughed darkly, shutting him up. "Now you tell me. Your hired killer. The one leaving bodies for yours truly to find and give respect...the name. I want the name."

"..." The Irkens at the table all looked around at each other. "...we're not telling you ANYTHING." One of the captains growled, pointing accusingly at the Red Helm.

The Red Helm's eyes narrowed as it pointed it's palm at the captain, a red circle glowing on it's palm as a burning blast of red energy shot clear through the air, snatching the captain up.

He barely had time to scream.

"That...is going to be all of you...unless you start talking." The Red Helm asked as everyone stepped away from Mr. Friz's head, Mr. Friz's right hand, Mr. Friz's left leg...heck, EVERYONE had a little piece of Mr. Friz to take home for a souvenir now.

"Earth culture's rather primitive, but it appears as though they're right about one thing...military intelligence truly IS an oxymoron. You're all really so dumb that you'll choose your empire over self-preservation? Yeah, just what your commanders taught you to. Mine..."

His eyes narrowed. "For me...it was different. As my commander lay DYING in front of me because of a mistake the Empire made, I realized then I didn't really give two shits what the higher-ups thought because as far as they were concerned, I was just cannon fodder. We're ALL just cannon
fodder. I might actually be doing you a favor, giving you all quick deaths here..." The vigilante spoke quietly, dangerously, eyes glimmering as he raised his gloved hand high. "I promised him to make people like you pay...and, well...you should NEVER break a promise." The helmeted being said calmly.

"Wiyn! Her name's Wiyn!" The black-skinned Irken immediately blabbed out, Mr. Friz's intestinal tract f his squeeley-spooch dangling off his head. "She's an Elite Grunt! Dark olive green skin and even darker green eyes!" The commander squealed, covering his head with his arms. "We gave her the list of known defects three months ago!"

"Well...that wasn't so hard, was it?" The Red Helm said cheerily, clapping his hands as he began to shrink back into the shadows. "Just remember...I'm watching...and I'm waiting for you to slip up again. If you send another one of her out there...you're dead."

With that, it was gone, and the little makeshift military tribunal looked around at each other, wondering what they'd unleashed.

... 
...
...
...it wasn't long before all of Senior's charges were sitting at a table at "Deep Fried Dan's Diner". Everything that wasn't fried and buttered was swimming in gravy, just the way most of them liked it.

"Hey, where's my sly-doo-dee-doo?"! Dite wanted to know, shouting furiously as he banged his fist on the table. The head chef pulled out a smoking...THING...from a furnace, holding it aloft on a prong, and calmly fake-ran through the diner, holding the burning thing high and humming the theme to the Olympics as he deposited it on Dite's plate. "...I'll be grateful when this "Earth" fad is over." Dite mumbled.

Yes, everybody had ordered something that would surely give them heart attacks...save for Feyr, who had decided to simply have some potato chips. Lots of them.

"I think your hand is becoming translucent." Xeil mumbled as the pink-eyed consular stuffed more and more into his mouth, hungrily gobbling the chips down, pieces of the chips spraying out over a dark, steely-grey table. "So much GREASE."

"Like your deep-fried Blorblegax Breast has any less." Feyr muttered out in between mouthfuls, slurping down his meal with some orange soda. "My, you're awfully hungry today, sir, if you do not mind me saying so." He added, looking at Senior as his taller hungrily wolfed down cheesy nachos. "It reminds me of the prisoners in our holding cells, they're so starved it's like they're eating for two!" He tapped his lip. "That reminds me, has anybody seen the latest "Irk Weekly"? There's been more and more captures of Resisty supporters on this planet, they're becoming AWFULLY popular for such a stupidly-named group."

"It's the theme song." Senior reasoned as he swallowed the last of his nachos, noticing the television above the bar had been turned on to the very show so the waitress and other patrons could see what the big deal was. "It's just so friggin' hard to not like."

The world is a vampire...sent to draaaa-aaaa-aaaaain!
"Yeah, we're badass," The grey-skinned, horned being named Lard Nar said as he addressed the camera, his green-goggled eyes catching the light of a passing sun as their ship soared through the stars.

**Despite all my rage, I am still just a rat in a cage!**

"Of COURSE you're gonna get sucked in after THAT." Senior insisted, waving his hand at the television as the show started. The Resisty were doing a raid, a LIVE raid upon...

Wait. Was that...

"...is that...the alley behind this diner??" The waitress asked as Lard Nar grinned into the camera.

"Perception filters. New! Improved! We're practically invisible here we see the BEAUTIFUL capital city of Irk! So much culture! So many Irkens!...we're gonna blow this diner up." The Vortian laughed. "Mostly for kicks and giggles."

"Everybody out of the diner, NOW!" Jayd yelled out, eyes widening as he turned to see-

Senior was gone. What the?

No, wait. He was now on the television, facing down the Resisty, two familiar pistols...well, familiar for Maht, anyhow, held high. "Stop the countdown." He demanded. "I am giving you fair warning, this is the kindest I can be to known rebels like you."

"...hello...big "N"." Lard Nar said quietly. "...been a a while, huh?"

"...stop this, Nar." Senior said. "I'm sorry we blamed your people for Spork and Miyuki, I AM, but if your kind keeps resisting, you'll keep suffering more."

"We'll suffer no matter what your kind do unless WE do something about it. So...no. stop what we're doing?...we can't do that. And...we WON'T," Lard Nar spoke, looking squarely at the Irken as his men vanished, teleporting away one by one, only he and a hooded Vortian remaining. "In ten seconds it goes ka-blooey. What can I say? I LIKE it when things go ka-boom." With that, Lard Nar stuck out his tongue, giving a loud raspberry.

"I SAID STOP IT, YOU STUPID!!!" Nick yelled, his PAK suddenly popping a tiny jet engine out from the end. He raced through the air right at Lard Nar...

But the hooded Vortian tackled him, and they were sent flying out of the alley as Lard Nar teleported to safety, the rest of the bar patrons running as fast as they could out of the diner before it could- 

It was like an enormous sparkling blue dome rose up from the back of the diner, encasing everything within a 100-foot radius. It sizzled and sparked, the others watching, eyes wide...until at last, the dome faded...and everything that had been within it was...just gone. GONE. As if it had never been.

"...don't suppose anyone has a portable television on them?" Dite asked calmly.

Jayd pulled out a small, scanner-shaped object from his belt, and it "pinged" as it came to life. He tuned it to the right channel with small little dials on either side of the portable TV before finally finding the broadcast of the Resisty...and a message was going out by a hooded being wearing blue.
She appeared to be standing before a large poster of the Resisty's that showed them all muscular and buff, with a faint light emanating to the right-hand-side of whatever room she was in.

"Greetings, planet Irk." A vaguely feminine voice crooned, a voice disguise filter keeping her real voice from being heard. "I am the Wing, who shields the Resisty. We are the new hope for this galaxy. Hope for a brighter future. Hope for a better world for all. We are willing...to allow Irk to become a part of that in exchange for it's surrender."

She gestured to the right, towards the soft light and the camera now focused on something that had manifested in an enormous storage bay...the diner that had just vanished, people being paraded out...not merely that, there were other buildings captured as well.

"They're TELEPORTALS. Miniature stations that send whomever's captured up to the Resisty!" Xeil realized. "Damnit, they've gotten smarter."

"We shall indoctrinate those captured, and they'll learn our ways...support our cause. If you seek a better life, you are free to seek us out. Defectives of Irk...those who desire more, remember...there is ALWAYS hope." The Wing insisted as the broadcast came to an end and they all looked around at each other.

"...always...hope? Well, they've not gotten any less corny." Dite laughed.

Meanwhile, Senior was grappling with the hooded Vortian in midair, spinning around and around, his PAK sending them higher and higher. "Stop this!" He demanded. "If you don't surrender now, we'll most likely BOTH die! Surrender and I'll spare your life, little Vortian!"

"I'd sooner die than be an Irken slave, you SCUM!" The Vortian spat in his face, trying to scratch him with her pointed nails. He grabbed her wrist, angrily glaring at her as a faint white light glimmered off his body.

"You will SLEEP now." Sude's voice came out of Senior's mouth. "I shan't let you harm my host."

The Vortian woman stiffened, eyes widening beneath the hood before she passed out in an instant, Senior looking stupidly down at what he had in his arms. "Did...did YOU do that?" He asked Sude.

"A, how shall I say this...fringe benefit." It told him. "I will do EVERYTHING to keep you from death."

Senior turned himself back towards the city, heading towards his charges, prisoner held carefully in his arms. "Well, this could work out even better than I thought..." He mused to himself as he touched down to where the others were. "Feyr, you're the one who deals with prisoners. Bring her back to the Massive, whilst I write up a report on what's occurred."

With that, the gang split up anew...nobody noticing where Dite was walking off too.

Nobody...save for Senior.
...vermin. All of them. Filthy vermin.

She hissed to herself, leaping from roof to roof, the stars shimmering overhead. Nighttime had fallen over her city. HER city. Hers and hers alone, for people like her.

And they weren't anything like the vermin she was hunting. She finally caught sight of him as she leaned on her knees by the edge of a high-speed monorail, eyes narrowing beneath the pink hood she wore. Dark shorts, shoulder guards, black gloves...Elite Grunt Wiyn was ready, and waiting...waiting...almost there...

She leapt down at him, laughing. "Riddle me this! What's pink and maroon, but covered in dark green?"

THWOMP!

"YOU!" She laughed, calmly getting off the terrified Invader as she pulled out a small electro-knife, lightning crackling from its tip. "When I land upon your sorry, wasteful behind."

"Wh-what do you want?!" It whimpered, blue eyes widening in horror.

"Well...your eyes. And then your life." Wiyn explained calmly, her knees pinning the Irken invader to the ground below as she held the knife to the vermin's eye. "You can help me send defects like you a message."

KRAKKA-THROOOOM!

Wiyn was knocked through the air by a shotgun blast of power as the Invader "eeped", staring at his unlikely savior...the Red Helm himself, who lowered a smoking hand, balefully glaring at Wiyn as she rose from out of the trash cans she'd knocked into. "Well?...what's the message?" He growled.

"A SIMPLE one, actually. CARE TO GUESS?!" Wiyn whined, tossing the knife away, pulling out two powerful-looking pistols as her PAK opened up, her arachnid-esque mechanical legs making her rise into the air like an armed spider. She grinned darkly, racing towards the Red Helm, firing away at him as the Invader she'd been terrorizing ran for his life, the Red Helm leaping away from her, spinning through the air.

She jumped after him, continuing to fire as he raced up the wall of a nearby armory, finally jumping off and slamming his booted feet into her face, knocking her back and forcing her hood down, revealing curled antennae and a horrid scowl. Deciding that the pistols just weren't cutting it, she snapped her fingers, two long blades sheathing out of the PAK as she raced towards the Red Helm, slashing and slicing as he danced away, trying to avoid her.

Unfortunately one hard PAK leg caught him under the chin and sent him flying into the wall. He panted heavily, some blood dribbling down from his helmet as he growled at her, a faint, spectral image momentarily appearing behind him. "So...you have all this power and all you do is kill people with it?"

"DEFECTIVES. Not "people"." Wiyn growled.

"That schmuck back there only had blue eyes!" The Red Helm snapped. "Who GIVES a flying-"
"I do! They should be red! Or purple! Or green! Or brown! Anything else is DEFECTIVE! And you...I can clearly tell YOU'RE defective. Personalizing such a gaudy outfit." Wiyn hissed, spinning her blades in a circular pattern.

"Oh, you view ANY sign of creativity as defectiveness, huh? Bite me."

"I DON'T MIND IF I DO!" She laughed, snapping her jaws and racing at him as he managed to leap away again, pointing a palm at her, a blast of blazing red power slamming into her back and knocking her into a dumpster, making her screech in pain. "Did you look into the Schism too, then?" She mused quietly. "Your outfit's beyond simple defectiveness."

"...no." The Red Helm said calmly. "I've been bound to a superior being. But I know of what you speak." He admitted. "Reality is bursting at the seams, right? But I don't really care. I'm just interested in getting even with everybody in a uniform. You couldn't find a better piece of scum than people like them...like the people who gave you up to save their own hides!" The helmeted Irken laughed, thrusting two arms forward, sweeping bands of red energy pinning Wiyn to the ground as he approached her, cracking his knuckles.

"Oh, yes, I heard from them. They had to be disposed of." She remarked calmly.

"You KILLED them for telling on you?" The Red Helm asked. "No honor among thieves, eh?"

"I am putting the good of the empire before my own life in dealing with defectives. They could have tried to do the same. Self-preservation over the Empire? Unacceptable." Wiyn said, suddenly bursting free of the bands that held her down and kicking the Red Helm in the gut, making him keel over and vulnerable to a powerful uppercut that launched him through the air.

The Red Helm panted as he lay on the ground, groaning as Wiyn approached, one PAK leg held high. "I thought you'd put up more of an effort."

Suddenly the Red Helm was not an Irken at all. Now he was a towering brute, head spiked and red eyes a-glow as a bladed tail swept back and forth and muscular arms gripped a surprised Wiyn tightly. "Oh tHiS iSn'T a FiGhT. It Is A sImPlE sLaUgHtEr." The thing laughed.

"PUT ME DOWN!" Wiyn snapped. "PUT MY AMAZINGLY SUPERIOR SELF-"

Wiyn didn't get the chance to finish her sentence. The thing launched her through the air, clapping imaginary dust off it's clawed hands as it reverted back to the Red Helm, who sighed.

"She'll be back, no doubt."

"I shall be waiting, then. I'm sorry you can't stay here to finish the job yourself, but don't worry. Next time she shows up, I'll have a party waiting for her. And when I say PARTY, I mean a whole lotta people that are gonna kill her DEAD!" The Entity of Rage laughed darkly.

Senior's eyes widened as Sude whispered for him to be quiet. "It is him. Chulainn. Entity of Rage."

"There are others like you?" Senior thought back at his host.

"Oh yes. Several of them." Sude said. "And I could vaguely sense them here on Irk. I imagine they've all bonded with hosts the way I've bonded with you."
"...maybe it's time...you tell me where you're from." Senior whispered.

"I heard that, Senior." Dite the Elite roared out, turning his head in Senior's direction as the Entity of Rage manifested by HIS charge. Senior frowned, stepping out of the alleyway, his own Entity hovering nearby.

"Well...well." Chulainn murmured, red eyes a-glitter, muscular arms folded over his chest. "If it isn't Puff the Magic Dragon...and his host. Pleased to meet you. Won'tcha guess my name?"

"I've heard that song before." Senior spoke up, waving a hand in the air. "I don't like it. Dite...how long have you been...tied to this thing?"

"That doesn't really matter, does it?" Dite inquired calmly. "...not to me. There's a war coming." Dite explained. "The Resisty's just the beginning of it. Can't you feel it? Reality is bursting apart, schisms in time and space are ripping open. The War of Light shall come....all will blend, becoming black, and then the White will sweep everything away. That's why we need to make sure you're alive." Dite told Sude, pointing with a finger, the helm falling away, revealing his true face.

HER true face.

"...you're...a girl." Senior gasped.

"Yes." She said quietly. "I am. My own private little secret." She laughed.

"I want to help you." Senior said. "Tell me how this happened. Let me help you. Please."

For a moment, genuine surprise flickered over Dite's face, and then her expression became slightly sad. "...you're frightened by what I am. But this is me now. It's too late for me. I'm staying here...and just getting started."

With that, she thrust her fist into the ground, a flash of red light blinding Senior before...

She was gone. He blinked stupidly, scratching his head before turning to his own entity. "Okay, TALK. What is this "War of Light"?" He demanded to know. "If you're gonna make me your host, you're gonna tell me why you need a host, why one of my charges is dismembering people around my planet!!!"

Sude chewed his lip. "...I'll explain it." He murmured. "...but once I do, I warn you...there's no going back."

"I'm not...scared." Senior growled at the draconic being's face.

"...well..." Sude folded his arms and sighed before he held one clawed hand up to it's host's head, as knowledge began to fill Senior's mind, images playing out before his eyes.

"It begins as all tales do...In the beginning..."
...in the beginning, there was light. The universe belonged to the light. For seven hundred and seventy seven years there was nothing but blinding white light. It looked upon all it saw, all it was, and all it was...was pure and good. Then came the splintering of the light as the foundations of the black were laid...

The light became many as it's purity died away. It became passion. It became diligence. It became intelligence. It became will. It became hope. It became love. It became compassion. The Seven Heavens looked upon their universe and swore to make sure all felt their blessings.

But they were splintered further and further. The white became more and more corrupted, chipped away, again and again until it was barely a whisper. In response, three of the Heavens grew darkened by the spreading of the corruption...

And they began to plot and plan. They felt only their light was the true light, and the others became just tainted enough to believe this lie to be true.

They shall fight. They shall begin the War of Light.

And The War of Light shall return all to White.

Senior fell to the ground, panting heavily. He had witnessed the very birth of the universe and life itself. Entire planets had just been born and then destroyed before his eyes...he understood now. The knowledge filled him.

It was NEAT.

"You've met what was once my passion. Now it's become Rage." Sude said. "I want to turn the corrupted entities good again...and find the others quickly. Stop this war before it spreads across the galaxy and makes innocents suffer. And I sense every single one of them is on this planet, a planet that holds the fate of much of the galaxy in it's hands." The draconic being insisted, clenching his fist tightly.

"Then...we need to ground the Massive. It's LEAVING in two hours." Senior realized out loud. "We keep it here, you and I will have more time to search, and any second counts."

"Speaking of "count", does this mean I can count on your assistance, then, Senior Communications Officer of the Massive?" Sude wished to know, tilting his head to the side slightly as he hovered around Senior, who stood back up on his feet.

"...please...call me "Nick"." The officer insisted. "...I prefer that among friends." He added sheepishly.
The entities of emotion were, to many a race, creation deities. They had beget many a species, including the Irken race, a race born from a union of Intelligence and Will.

And now the species born from Hope was poised to end the Irken race. High above the planet Irk, aiding the Resisty ships as countless others formed a blockade to cut off Irk from the rest of the galaxy, it appeared as though all of Irk's hopes laid in the Wing, the host to Hope, herself an Irken...

"Please." She insisted, clasping her hands together, getting on bent knee before the Meekrob race as the "lighties" hovered before her. The rest of the Resisty stood behind her, Lard Nar frowning slightly. He had had reservations originally about having her join his crew, but she'd proven invaluable, gentle, and above all, considerate. She had owed the Resisty a debt after they'd saved her life...and she'd repaid it time and time again. Now she asked for clemency...

"Can't we give them half a year?" Lard Nar finally asked. "...I don't like the idea of giving the Irkens much time, but just a few months to surrender?" He went on, waving his hands in the air. "It's only fair."

"Would THEY give YOUR race the same mercy?" The leader of the Meekrob growled in its ethereal voice. Sarong was not a kindly being by nature. "DID they give your race half a year to submit before they pitilessly invaded, foul little BUGS that they are?"

"...aren't we supposed to be better than the bugs?" A third voice spoke up, as they turned to see two people stepping off a teleportal pad, dusting themselves off. "The Massive's been moved. Sold. Fresh off the market and on it's way to a very, VERY happy customer."

"Well, THAT would put a smile on my face had I a face!" Sarong laughed. "...alright. I'll give the Irkens a MONTH to surrender to our blockade, to come over to our way of thinking. Get the message out." The phantom-esque glowing being demanded, turning his head to his people as they moved along with the Resisty to the communications relay. "I sincerely HOPE...for your people's sake...they do the smart thing and give in." Sarong told the Wing.

"I have faith that they will make the right choice in the end." The Wing said as she stood up, nodding firmly, moving majestically back to her quarters as she laid down on her bed, noticing her room's communication was going off. She picked up the phone, listening intently. "Yes?"

"...milady, it's me."

The Wing's eyes went wide as the Entity of Hope shimmered overhead. "Turn up the volume, quick." It asked.

"What's happening?"

"The worst, that's what. My friends tapped into your powers with the Exemplar rings. I NEED access to Hope. I need a way to break a hold that Two has over Earth's Avatar of Will, Dilbert Membrane. Otherwise he won't have a fighting chance and...and kids are gonna die."

"I'll be happy to assist, but what of the Entity of Will? Have you contacted it?"
"I don't know where it IS, only you, Compassion and Love are on my speed dial...I don't suppose any others have appeared that could be of help?"

"...the Entity of Corrupted Passion, Rage. He's appeared, but he...he won't help. Not yet. We need to have faith in Sude, who is still bonding with his own host."

"They need to hurry. YOU need to hurry."

"I'll do what I can. I must ask though...you'll need a deputy to assist you. Dib is the Pillar of Will on Earth, is he not?"

"And Gaz is Rage, yes. And you wanna know if there's one for Hope on the Base Planet? Yes. And you know him."

"Who?"

"Skoodge."

The Wing chuckled. "Oh, Skoodge, that dear little soldier. Such a cheery soul. Always looking forward, always devoted. Yes...yes, I don't think we need to worry, Frequency..."

The Wing and Entity of Hope, Psyche, smiled.

"All will be well."

Dib paced around in front of his classroom, sighing as he held his hands behind his back, chewing his lip. The Principal had announced that everyone was to leave the school building in an orderly fashion, one class at a time due to a bomb scare.

Naturally, everyone thought Dib or his sister had something to do with it. Mostly because Zim and his weird "cousin", Skoodge, wasn't in class to be pointed and hissed at. M"Alright. I am about to tell you the explanation but if I know you all...and I DO..."

He rolled his eyes at this. "You're all so ignorant you won't believe it. So here goes. A psychotic alien forced a magical kind of ring on me and my sister. He turned us into Manchurian agents that would have decimated the school around lunchtime due to a trigger he put in us. I'm still not entirely sure why. But you aren't buying ANY of that, are you?"

All of the class looked at each other, blinked, and most of them broke out into laughter. Gretchen just sighed, leaning back in her chair, head hung low as Dib sighed and pinched the space between his eyes, chewing on his lip again. "...all right, fine. Nevermind. Moot point, anyhow." God they're all IDIOTS! I'm surrounded by ID! IT! OTS!

"Moot point indeed." A voice, filled with snarling rage, a faint laugh lingering in the air called out.

KRUCHA-THROOOOOM! The wall was practically shattered as Two barreled through it, encased in a red energy aura, slamming Dib through the wall on the other side, windows and wall shattering. Soon the class, in fact, the whole school was watching as Dib was sent sprawling across the football field of the High Skool, Two standing tall, fists clenched as red energy rippled from his body.

"Ah, RAGE." Two laughed. "The "Passion" turned dark just like "Diligence" became "Avarice"! A step up, in my humble opinion. See, unlike Miyu, who's off to visit my daddy dearest here in town, I don't "want it all". Nah. I think smaller. I'll just settle for my existence restored to stability as your world is transformed into MINE."
He leapt through the air, fist flying, but Dib managed to roll out of the way, Two growling angrily. "Forgot, I gave you until after lunch to have most of your will back...and I DO suppose stripping any chance you have of fighting back against me would be cheating." Two mused as Dib leaped to his feet, pointing his ring at Two.

"GO!" He yelled out.

Tiny little sparks jutted out, wisps of green slipping to the ground...but nothing. Nothing happened.

"Then again..." Two laughed, his knee going squarely into Dib's gut, knocking Dib to the football field's grass below as he cracked his neck before delivering ANOTHER kick to Dib's side, "I also have kept you from using your ring. So it's hardly a fair fight. I LIKE these odds."

THWUH-THWUCK! Dib was rolled over onto his side as Two knelt down, grabbing his throat. "I...am going to beat you so...so...badly. I'll make this last. And then, after I've stopped by this lovely Chinese restaurant in town for some noodles..." The alien leered, his golden eyes glittering like a dark fire. "I'm going to come back, have you and your sister burn this whole place down with everyone in it, and make sure you're conscious through it all. See, I WAS going to strip your consciousness from your body after this, but frankly...I think me leaving you helpless, trapped inside your own body has a certain poetic CRUELTY to it, wouldn't you say?"

He sniggered darkly, throttling Dib with his clawed hands. "Ooh, I LOVE me when I'm NASTY."

KRA-THROOMP! Two was knocked clean through the air as Gaz lowered the bench she'd carried from the end of the football field, folding her arms down at Dib. "Get up, you idiot. If ANYBODY'S gonna kick your ass, it's me and me alone."

"Thanks, Gaz!" Dib said, laughing with relief as he stood up and made to hug his dear sister, arms stretching wide. I-

"If you get REMOTELY sentimental I'm feeding you your own nose." Gaz said swiftly, Dib shutting up and turning to face Two as he stood up, nursing a bleeding head as he frowned at them.

"Gaz...almost forgot about you. You know..." He rubbed his chin. "...you look so much like my great aunt, at least, from what the old photo albums showed of her. How'd she die again? Lab accident?"

Gaz turned pale at this. Not with fear, though. This was pure, undiluted grief running through her as Two dusted himself off.

How does he know about Mom? Dib thought.

It had been an ordinary day. Well...as ordinary as life with Prof. Membrane GETS. Peggy Membrane was listening to him speak about his latest invention in his laboratory as Dib, age 7, and Gaz, age 5, stood nearby in the Professor's considerably larger-on-the-inside-than-it-was-the-outside garage laboratory was lighted up.

"How uh...how does...this...um..." Dib asked again as Prof. Membrane strode by him, a strange, bulbous helmet atop his head as he fiddled around with a screwdriver and a control pad in his long, black-gloved hands. He was wearing his large labcoat...he ALWAYS wore his labcoat in the lab, but never in the house, thank God. Peggy always said it smelled too much like plastic.

"Compression technology." The professor laughed. "Shrinking something very, very, VERY big and compacting it into a pocket dimension, I'M A
"GENIUS!" He hovered in the air, lightning splitting the air around him as Peggy quickly snatched Gaz away from an accidental bolt that almost singed her hair. "Sorry, I've GOT to be more careful about where I gloat, my dear." Matthew Membrane told "Pegster", taking the helmet off and motioning for his family to come by a table with several vats nearby labeled "DANGEROUS: EXPLODING CHEMICAL COMPOUNDS! DO! NOT! OPEN! SUPER-SERIOUSLY!" written over them.

"What's that?" Peggy inquired, pointing at his latest invention, what appeared to be some kind of mechanical clip for the hair. "You told me your invention was SMALL and unassuming but...you DO know somebody's already invented these Bluetooth things, right?" Peggy laughed.

"My dear, it's a device that lets me speak any language! Even to animals!" Prof. Membrane laughed, pulling on a lever nearby as several cages filled with animals popped up from beneath the floor, all of them looking at the family.

"Ooh, big kitty!" Gaz said, pointing at the tiger as Dib looked at a snake. It began to hiss, it's eyes almost...glowing?

Prof. Membrane quickly led Dib away from the cage, the snake cursing under its breath as Membrane held the strange, segmented clip up, giving it to Peggy. "Put it in your hair. It will transmit signals to your brain, to the part centering around language recognition. All barriers are broken down INSTANTLY! The aftereffects have been odd...something of a shared link...I talked with that bunny yesterday and after that I kept thumping my foot against the ground for half an hour."

Peggy put the clip in her hair and stared at said bunny as it chuckled. "Ooh, have I got a carrot for YOU!" It said, giggling immaturely.

"OH!" Peggy clasped the sides of her face with her hands, gasping. "You little!" She waved her finger at it and took the clip off. "Maybe I should go find a nice CAT or something to talk to." She told her husband. "Here you go, Matt."

She tossed it back to him and he stepped back to catch it...

And he went knocking into a plank that had a small vat of "Exploding Chemical Compounds" placed on the other end. Like a catapult, the small vat was launched through the air at a stunned Peggy as Dib looked up in horror, eyes widening, Gaz's mouth beginning to open in a gasp as Matthew Membrane watched most of his wife become a sloughed pile of flesh...

He never took off the lab coat after that...there was always a tiny bit of Peggy still lingering on the edges of his collar...

A tiny bit of Peggy lingering in his heart.

"Do you know what rage TRULY is? The most powerful kind of hatred ISN'T born from ignorance or prejudice or from a perceived threat. Oh no." The alien waved a claw in the air. "Those are Fear in disguise. The real fire that fuels the burning hatred of rage...is personal loss. That's why I wear the red."

Two held his fist up as Gaz and Dib readied themselves, Gaz shaking angrily. "You lost your mother, you must have felt so unhappy, so ANGRY. You didn't understand. Why, why did it have to happen? And I think you blamed your father...and a tiny bit of you blamed your brother, because
neither one of them were strong enough to help."

Gaz opened her mouth to say something, but then closed her eyes and clenched her fists, holding them tightly to her sides. ". . . that's ... it wasn't MY fault... somebody had to ... take the blame. I LOVED ... her." She whispered out. ". . . I LOVED her so... so much..."

"... my own mother is slowly dying. WILL die if my world isn't returned." Two told them softly.

"Then you know how I felt. Then you know that if I had the power... I would have done anything, ANYTHING to get her back." Gaz asked in her dark, accusing tone. "I have that power now... you FORCED it on me, but with you dead and gone, and me with this power..."

She held up her ring, grinning coldly. "I WILL find a way. I'm smart, and I'm tough... and there's not a kid in the world who wouldn't burn it all down if it meant getting back his mommy."

"Oh, Gaz..." Two whispered softly, almost sadly. "You couldn't have described me any better."

And with that, he launched himself at them, claws held high.

... ... ...

... "So..." Nick inquired, his county-boy accent thick and homely as he sat down on the pink, fluffy couch with the squat Irken Invader Skoodge at Zim's house, Zim having gone off to the Radioshack to pick up "supplies" as GIR did his own "private thing" in the laboratory. "If Mr. Billingsly is the sleaziest, number one backstabbing lover in all the town, why's he defending this gal off the street? Reckon it don't make no sense." He asked Skoodge, who was, before you ask, NOT in any disguise.

Oh no, Invader Skoodge, short, fat and cuddly Invader Skoodge, was "au naturale", ladies and gents... well, except for the clothes he was wearing, his usual maroon Invader's attire with that mysterious splotch lingering on his stomach.

"It's because before he got amnesia, William Billingsly was the sleaziest number-one LAWYER in Dawson County!" Skoodge explained, waving a gloved hand in the air as Nick passed the chocolate-covered popcorn GIR had made over to him, Skoodge tossing a handful into his mouth.

He liked having the human over. It got so boring, just being stuck in Zim's basement. This way he could talk about human soap operas like "Kissy-Kissy-Boo-Boo" AND wrestling programs like "Skull Squisher" all he wanted and with somebody who wasn't too "busy" or "stupid" to care about either one. Plus, in the event he ever said too much about Irken culture, he'd just erase Nick's memories with a little mini-squid Zim had developed to be attached to people's heads.

...again.

Yeah, he'd tested out a LOT of things on Nick and-oh. Skoodge grimly frowned as Nick took off his cap, scratching at the...

He couldn't bear to look at it. Skoodge looked away, almost puking up the popcorn he'd gobbled down as Nick decided to use the bathroom, promising to come back with soda from the kitchen as Skoodge sighed, turning his head slowly back to the television. Nice kid, that Nick. Stupid, yeah, but nice. Even before what Zim had done to him.
Skoodge was a trained and experienced invader. He did not ever take his job personally, and he understood that Dib had his own duty to save the planet just as he had a duty to help Zim take it over. It was, on an intellectual level, sad. In another time and place, he might have been capable of being friends with the humans. It was somewhat sad he never could be. There was a lot about this world he liked. And he was beginning to fall into an enjoyable rhythm, just staying here on Earth, hanging out.

Maybe...one day...maybe this would feel like his real home. Maybe one day he'd fine that thing he needed to make him want to stay forever. Maybe one day he WOULD be friends, and there wouldn't be a need for this back-and-forth, and they could just...BE. He was fine with waiting. He was good at that...the waiting and the hoping.

Heck, truth be told, even ZIM was beginning to fall into a steady pattern. A new plan every week instead of every day, and there was a faint camaraderie between he and the Dib-human. Sometimes, Skoodge, he could swear Zim LIKED being continuously beaten. LIKED being stuck here, constantly plotting.

Heck, GIR liked Earth plenty, Skoodge thought to himself as he snuck over to the linen closet and pulled it open, a monitor revealing what was occurring in the laboratory downstairs. GIR was dancing around, a disco ball hanging overhead as lights sprayed around, the little robot posing and singing as he strutted his stuff.

"Can't read my, can't read my,
No he can't read my Poker Face!"

"She aint' got to love nobody!" GIR sang out, waving his butt in the air before he whipped around, holding his arms behind his head and shaking his groove thing.

"Can't read my, can't read my,
No he can't read my Poker Face!"

Yep, nothing changed around here, Skoodge thought to himself as he closed the door, returning to the couch and turning back to the television. The state of normalcy: sitting and waiting for something to happen, and usually, it did. In the end. Things tended to work out in the end, Skoodge thought to himself as he popped some more chocolate popcorn in his mouth. He just had to keep where he was. Stay happy. Keep believing...

He stiffened suddenly, as a voice called out to him, a faint accent lingering in it as he slowly turned his head, looking upon a blue-furred being that had stepped into the living room. It wore a blue cap with a strange white symbol on it's head, and blue shorts to match with a special ring in one hand...a ring with a blue symbol upon it that was being offered to him. To HIM.

"Skoodge of Irk." Frequency said cheerily. "Stoic ol' Skoodge. You have the ability to feel great hope."

He put the ring in Skoodge's hand and Skoodge slowly slipped it on, eyes widening. It felt so natural...like he'd been missing a limb all his life, forced to wear a prosthetic but now gaining back his old hand...

Meanwhile, a maroon-eyed, green-skinned being, Invader Zim himself, was walking back from Radio Shack to his house, his arms filled with sacks full to the brim of technical material he needed for his latest plan.
"Brilliant, BRILLIANT! I'll transform pigs into half-human slaves, rounding up humans and overriding their genetic code with my own glorious Irken DNA!" Zim laughed to himself. "Irken and human fused together and at my command, I'll build a new Irken Empire right here on Planet Earth!"

He blinked suddenly, frowning as he put down his bags and scratched his head. "Wait. I'm TALKING TO MYSELF...vrik na tishanti!" He cursed. "I'm becoming too much like the Dib-Stink." He sighed and reached into his maroon outfit, pulling out a small notepad from within. "And have I already done something like this lately? Better check the list."

He took out a pen that popped up from his PAK, flipping through the notebook. "Hmm. Fiddle with gravity in school...launching chickens into outer space...replacing organs with STUFF...launching COWS into outer space...launching GHOST INSPECTORS into outer space...oh. "Turn dogs into dog-people". Ah, DOGS, not pigs. Yep, this'll work!"

"Observation: You always had a knack for such ideas. Insanely brilliant...they called you mad." A metallic, yet distinctly feminine voice rang out, making Zim whip his head in its direction as he saw a robotic female approach him, black-outfit making her look VERY slim, with a red helm over her head and tipless white gloves showing off almost Irken-like long clawed fingers. "But madness is merely genius to a small mind, and when compared to you, most organics have small minds."

"...what ARE you? Explain yourself!" Zim demanded angrily, pointing at her. "Tell Zim!"

"Explanation: I have an offer for you." The woman said. "I am Miyu. I ask this..."

She held up a ring in her finger...a faint orange glow to it.

"Join my corps."

... ...

... The kids of the school were watching, their teachers unable to get them to leave as they saw Gaz and Dib struggling with Two, who kept flinging them around the football field, kicking and punching them whenever they got close enough. Dib had managed to bust one of Two's cheek bones, and Gaz had delivered, WAS delivering- 

"YOOOOOWWW-OOOOOO-HOOOO-HOOOO-HOOOO!"

Ooooch. Gaz fought DIRTY. Two staggered back, flailing out with his ring as a medieval torture rack attached itself via energy construct to Gaz, trying to stretch her out as Dib struggled to break her free, Two cradling his sore crotch. "Y-you dirty little...GAAAAAH..."He muttered out.

"You're just going to stand there and watch them suffer like that?" Gretchen asked the others as Ms. Bitters calmly looked up from her copy of "Beyond Good and Evil", "harrumphed" and went back to reading. The rest of the class looked around at each other, almost hesitant.

"We can't just stand here and WATCH!" Gretchen insisted angrily, waving her arms in the air. "We've gotta DO something! ANYTHING to help them!"

"That thing can shoot finger-beams. What're we gonna do?" The Letter M asked, scratching his head as Poonchy nodding in agreement.
"Oooooh. He just made a shark." Zita called out as Dib yelled for his life, climbing one of the football poles as Two danced in victory, Gaz being beaten up by a cheer-leading team he'd summoned forth with his ring, Gaz swearing to rip off Two's head and make him eat it later. Somehow.

She could do it, you know! She TOTALLY could!

"GRAAAAH!" Gretchen tugged at her hair, exiting the room and stomping out into the hallway-Running into a beautiful-looking being who was standing by the Guidance Counselor. Her eyes widened as the Guidance Counselor nodded at the angel.

"This is her."

"I'm surprised you figured it out."

"I spent years around the Entity of Love. I know souls filled with it. And her love for Dib has marked her."

The Beautiful Angel stepped forward, putting something in Gretchen's hand. "You won't remember us. Nobody in this school will remember us, my friend will make sure of that. But when the time comes, you'll know what to do inside your heart." The Beautiful Angel crooned, taking Gretchen's cheek and kissing her on the forehead before leaving, Gretchen moving the ring in her hand to her pocket as the Guidance Counselor took her shoulder.

It was as if a veil that had been placed over her eyes was ripped away. "Wh-what was I doing?" She asked, scratching her head as Mr. Thildari moved her back to the class.

"I THINK you were watching THAT." Mr. Thildari said cheerily, pointing outside the opened-up walls as two forms descended from the sky on blue wings, Dib gasping as a green blaze swirled around him, power coursing through his body. Now he was returned to his once-heroic form, standing tall and proud, his Will reasserted over the ring as Two snarled furiously, turning on Frequency.

"You! And...and YOU?" He gasped, seeing Skoodge as Skoodge smiled over in a surprised Dib and Gaz's direction.

"Power levels at 104%...119%...124%..." Dib's ring called out as Skoodge gave Dib the best thumbs up he could.

"Don't worry, Dib-Thing. Hope's wings have always lifted Will higher than it could ever soar. Trust me...All will be well." Skoodge spoke kindly, comfortingly.

And did he look IMPRESSIVE. A cloth covering the top of his head and forehead, with the white symbol of Hope emblazoned upon it. His outfit was vaguely Shamanic...long robe-like shirt to wear, exposing his arms, tipless gloves, plain, simple...and above all, he looked so peaceful and comforted. So SMUG, almost.

"So you've betrayed us?" Two growled at Frequency.

"What can I say, dude?" Frequency laughed, holding his ring up with Dib and Skoodge. "Except...COWABUNGAAAAAA!"

With that, an ENORMOUS blue wave of energy shot forth from Frequency's ring, formed like a tidal wave that SLAMMED into Zerinim Two Jookiba with all the fury of an ocean, as Dib now
launched his OWN shark at Two, the pointy nose JAMMING into Two's chest, making him gasp in pain as he was sent spiraling through the air, knocked around by the wave...

Skoodge leaped forward, forming an enormous pair of hands that suddenly pinned Two to the ground, a pair of hands that rapidly became attached to the energy construct of a professional wrestler.

"And now Rodrick has his evil twin Rodrick in a Leg Hold!" Skoodge laughed, the wrestler slamming Two into the ground over and over before tossing him through the goal posts.

"TOUCHDOWN!" Gaz laughed, racing towards Two and kicking him squarely in the face, knocking him through the air and towards the school, right in the direction of Ms. Bitters.

"Huh?" She looked up just in time.

KA-THRUNCKA!

Everyone let out a simultaneous "Ewwwww" and stepped away as Two stood up, dusting himself off and looking down beneath him at what he'd landed on. He stuck his worm-like tongue out, stepping off and watching as Ms. Bitters' feet curled up, the rest of her body melting away as she let out a final sigh of "What a woooorld".

"It's over." Dib said, cracking his knuckles as Skoodge, Frequency, Gaz and he approached Two, who growled and reached into his vest, pulling out a small capsule-like computer.

"You'll never control Dib again, not with ME here, brah." Frequency proclaimed. "And you ain't gonna get to GAZ, either. We've spoken with the Big Bad behind it himself and he's given the ALL clear. Try to take her over again, you get a wipe out!"

"No. It's just BEGINNING." Two growled out. "EMERGENCY TEMPORAL SHIFT."

With a WHOOMP, he was gone, vanished from sight as the class looked from the wreckage to Dib, who scratched the back of his head. Were they FINALLY going to believe him now about the aliens thing?

"I guess...you're all wondering about all of that, right?" He asked.

"It's a gang war, you see." Mr. Thildari said quickly, stepping forward and waving a hand in the air. "Dib informed me that members of a gang who were INSANELY jealous of our school since it's so amazing, especially the clean bathrooms..."

"Oh yeah, yeah."

"Absolutely."

"Of course." Everyone agreed, nodding their heads.

"So they prepared to carry out an attack and decided to beat up Dib because he was the most noticeable of us all with his big head. Luckily Dib's friends here were skilled enough to fend them off with the fancy technological equipment that Prof. Membrane loaned his son and his friends in the event something strange like this ever happened. Isn't that right, Gaz?" Mr. Thildari wanted to know.

Gaz shrugged. "Yeah. Whatever."

"Oh, yes, YES." Gretchen said quickly. "Oh, Dib and I have talked about this before when we're
alone! Some people have mace in their pockets, he's got super-tech!" She lied with a smile, quickly putting one arm around his and grinning.

"Er...yeah! Big, bad, rival gangs! It was all a rival gang." Dib decided quickly, gulping nervously. "DEFINITELY not aliens! And these guys are just in costumes cuz they were going to a party at my house later this afternoon. Costume party. Really private affair and stuff. Right, Gaz?"

"Yeah. Costume party. I mean, you can see the zipper!" Gaz chuckled, pointing at Skoodge's teeth as he grinned.

"Well, I think Gretchen had best inform the principal of our little...predicament...with your teacher." Mr. Thildari told the class. "And I think that perhaps I should drive you home, Dilbert, Gazeline...it's been a long, long day and I think we could all use a break, especially you two..."

"I can't BELIEVE they bought it. I can't believe TWO bought it! One of the worst performances of my career and he didn't doubt it for a second." Frequency laughed, slapping his knee as Skoodge poured everyone some soda using GIR, who opened up his mouth. Gaz then closed GIR up and moved him over her chips, pulling down on an arm as nacho cheese was squirted down onto her snack. "I don't even know what the Entity of Rage LOOKS like! Ha! This is off...the...HOOK!"

"Hope, huh?" Dib inquired, looking Skoodge over as he calmly sipped some Diet-Poopsi, nodding sagely.

"Yes. Our Exemplar Rings gain power from the Entities of Emotions, and I was meant to wield Hope the way you were meant to wield Will, and Gaz was meant to wield Rage." Skoodge explained.

"Meant to? Entities?" Dib asked.

"What...ARE you?" Zim inquired, eyes widening at the ring in Miyu's hand.

"I suppose I should explain." Frequency admitted, sitting in a chair nearby as GIR clapped his hands together, beaming.

"It's STORYTIME?" GIR asked cheerily, hopping up and down.

"Uh...yep."

"Ooh, does it involve monkeys?"

Skoodge snorted, looking over in Dib and Gaz's directions as Gaz growled. "What's THAT supposed to mean?"

Frequency laughed and chuckled slightly, holding out his ring as a series of images began to form for them all, GIR's eyes widening. "Ooooooooh. Laser llliiights..."

"In the beginning, there was just one universe planned for creation. What happened...was something quite different. There was a...change...in the nature of the cosmos." Mr. Thildari explained calmly.

"Instead of ONE universe being made, a multiverse was created." Miyu went on. "Endless parallel
worlds, similar in some ways, bizarrely different in others, were formed. All were occupying the same space, but vibrating at entirely different frequencies."

"Like two cars parked side by side in the same parking lot...or sometimes right on top of one another, with nobody realizing." The guidance counselor suggested.

"And there were entities, beings of INCREDIBLE power, that watched over all of this and spread the power of emotions through the universe." Miyu murmured. "The first was entity of Life, Sude, of the Seraphi race."

Zim blinked. "The Seraphi?" Wait, the Irken race had SENT invaders in the direction of the so-called home of the Seraphi, the planet Allforce. What had happened to them? Had they became dragon chow? They'd never heard from the fools again...

"I know what you're thinking. The race did not perform things such as that. They were the kind who offered laughter and joy up to their God instead of blood rituals. They simply sent Irken laughter to Sude."

Zim raised a non-existent eyebrow. "...wait...you mean?"

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO...

"WE'LL TICKLE YOU FOREVER!" One brown and yellow-horned draconic being exclaimed as he held a giant feather up from a box, the tied-up Irken nearby gulping as his friends were held in place. "Prepare to enter the unbearable world of COOCHY-COOCHY-COO!"

PRESENT...

"ANNNNYHOW, the next was the entity of Passion, Chulainn. He's turned all nasty and dark when he became "Rage". Frequency went on with a sad expression flickering across his face. "Poor dude. Then we got the pretty lil' entity of Hope, Psyche. She's cute, in a weird way." He added, tilting his head to the side. "Kinda...looks like a butterfly. I think she IS that, a big, alien butterfly."

"And I spent many years conversing with the Entity of Love before I came here." Mr. Thildari explained, putting one hand to his chest. "Jourmungdr sent me here to the Base Earth to keep an eye on the planet and those within. It said this place was too important to be ignored. I've been keeping up a guise, with the Entity taking my place back at my home planet without anybody noticing."

"This world...this MUDBALL is...actually important?" Zim scratched his head. "How?"

"EVERYTHING in the multiverse stems from the material found in this base Earth." Skoodge interjected. "Remember when he talked about the "parking lot" analogy? Think of your world as an original model of car, and every other car in the lot is a rip-off or copy of that original." Skoodge went on as visible models of the many parallel Earths floated around.

"Without this world, there won't BE any other parallel Earths. No more stories of Zim and Dib and Gaz and GIR. This world is the cornerstone upon which the multiverse of Universe I-Z spins..." Miyu went on, gesticulating in the air. "Within this world...there's the POTENTIAL to remake the world that was tragically lost."

"They want to bring it back. If one tried to sacrifice enough of this world, Earth B-S will return. The people of this world will be, well...they get folded into the historical fabric. Become reborn anew, I guess you could say..." Frequency admitted.

"I'll DIE?"
"Answer: You'll become BETTER." Miyu informed him waving a clawed finger in the air. "You will reach your physical and mental peak, and will become a being both feared, loved and admired across the universe. And it is not just you. GIR, Minimoose, they'll be better too. People will respect you, Zim, be amazed at what you've become. I would never not lie..."

She gently took his shoulder, smiling at him as the visor on her helmet lifted up, and Zim's eyes widened in surprise. "To my own father."

"I...I need to...think about this." Zim mumbled.

"Statement: I shall do you one better." Miyu informed him as he pocketed his ring. "I will take you to your wife. I think you'll be more than pleasantly surprised."

Zim's eyes bugged out, mouth flopping open. "Zim has a WHAT?"
The feminine Vortian nervously rubbed the back of her neck as Feyr handed her a cup of coffee, giving her a gentle pat on the hand as he did so. She was used to his "there-there" treatment...it was commonplace. All the prisoners had referred to him as a touchy-feely kind of being.

How odd that Irken society would produce one so tender and sweet. He enjoyed talking to them about their families, their friends. Personal stories, usually.

"So where were we last?" Feyr the Consular inquired, one invisible eyebrow arched up as he fingered the necklace as it hung over his chest, a glittering orb almost pulsing with life. "I think you were telling me about the time that your garage caught on fire."

"Oh, right, right." Halle nodded, leaning back in her chair, looking away from her interrogator and up at the ceiling. "I can remember the smell of smoke...that was what we first noticed. It made us turn our heads, glance out the window...somehow, under the burning hot Vortian sun, our garage had caught aflame. And then it EXPLODED."

She chuckled slightly. "It was quite the sight, lemme tell you. Smoky haze hung around for days, and grandma's ears were ringin'." She hesitated then, looking over in his direction as he smiled down at the orb on his necklace before glancing back to her. "But why do you always like talking about our family life? You never ask us about any secret sabotage plans, no plots to bring down your vile empire..."

"Frankly, I sympathize. The only thing the Irken Empire loves is itself, and that's quite unacceptable to us Consulars." Feyr told her, his fern-like antennae sweeping over his head as he sighed. "Absolutely unacceptable. But they'll never know our true goals. We have ruled their lives since they first looked upon us, but they'll never know. All it takes is one touch and we have control over the minds of others."

Halle giggled slightly, a bubbly, tingly feeling rising off her. Was...was the room spinning? She couldn't concentrate. It all seemed so...funny, she...she was shrinking. Getting smaller and smaller. Wow. Like...wow.

"You're probably asking why I'm telling you this...no, no." He stroked his chin. "You're asking if you're really shrinking, I think. And the answer is I put a special venom secreted from our all-powerful Entity into your coffee..."

"V-Venom? Like a snake's? Wh-what's...what's going on?" Halle giggled again, hiccupping slightly.

"I have been "setting you up" for quite some time. Sometimes it takes longer on others who have stronger wills, but in the end, you all shrink."

Feyr calmly waltzed over to her form, carefully plucking up her tiny, shrunken body, giving her a
gentle pat on the head with a careful claw. "You see, little one...the minute you let me touch you all those days ago, your mind became an open book and I learned all I needed and reported it. You're not the first, and you won't be the last. You're in my coils now...and you're going on a trip."

Carefully, he held the tiny figure over his mouth, zipper-toothed maw opening wide. The inside of his mouth was a strange color, grayish-green, a sharp contrast against the pinkish teeth, though his gums were slightly greenish/pink. He tilted his head back, placing the shrunken Vortian on his tongue.

Halle had given up on resisting...it felt so natural...she trusted this gentle giant, and allowed herself to relax as he began to swallow, her feet being the first to enter. She slid into his throat, a slight pull on her body as she straightened herself out, looking behind her at the world outside his mouth as her waist and chest entered his throat. The throat finally slurped her up, sliding down and depositing her squarely in his stomach.

She could feel a gentle hand rubbing the outside, and hear his psychic voice within her head, still quite tender and sweet. "Don't worry, there's no acids in there, and the saliva your body is coated with now will put you into a state of suspended animation until you're ready to come out." Feyr intoned as Halle looked down at her feet, seeing shimmering pink crystals rise, covering her, aiming to engulf her body.

"It'll all be over soon, little Vortian. Just wait...soon you'll be in your new home..." Feyr purred in pleasure, the little one crystallizing in his belly's pit as he licked his claws free of her taste. Quite good, yes. Not quite as good as Irken flesh, admittedly, but it had a distinct flavor to it...and to think, he had three more prisoners to interrogate today...

The Consulars took a sense of pride in giving new meaning to the term "I want you inside me"...

The city...of Philadelphia! Located fifteen miles from anything non life-threatening.

Ahhh, the quiet state of Pennsylvania...and a demon is on the loose.

The people...are terrified!

The police...BAFFLED!

This FIENDISH being strikes without warning! Without mercy!

With diabolical cleverness...

He draws mustaches on people's faces.

It could be you...it could be ME...

"But it happens to be ME!" GIR the robot said cheerily as he waved his marker in the air, calmly stepping away from a movie theater, every single poster now desecrated by black mustaches drawn on every living being within. Monster movie? Godzilla looks great with a handlebar. Cameron Diaz has a fine and thick brushy mustache.

GIR WOULD have drawn one on Michael Jordan's underwear AD located by the snack machine, but he thought the Hitler moustache he was rocking was embarrassing enough.
You see, ladies and gentlemen, GIR...could see as GODS DO. He knew things, understood things, that nobody else did. Didn'tcha, GIR?

"You're darn tootin' right!" GIR cheerfully exclaimed, nodding in agreement as he strode from the theater, putting one robotic hand over his chest, over the big red watch that constituted for his heart. "We all have our missions in life. We get into different ruts. Some are the cogs on the wheels..."

He then burst out giggling, bouncing back and forth. "And others are just plain NUTS!" He put a finger over his lip and bounced it over and over, going "Hoo-hoo, hoo-hoo" as he bounded back home.

He was momentarily distracted though, by seeing Dib peeking out at him from HIS house, via the window. Dib was looking through binoculars straight at GIR, one eyebrow raised.

"Nope. No ring on him yet." Dib murmured, seeing GIR wave and grin at him as he made his way down the sidewalk. He scratched his head, turning it to see a large billboard showing Poop Dawg, the head spokesdog-person-thing for Poop Cola, drinking a can of his signature drink and now sporting a "Robin Hood" style moustache. "GIR has WAAAAAY too much free time." He mumbled, turning back to shake his head at Gaz as she played away on her GameSlaveX, the latest in the video game system series.

He poked his head back out the window to try and focus in on ZIM'S house this time, but before he could get out his binoculars, GIR promptly swung down on a pulley system he'd somehow erected atop of Dib's house, marker in hand, drawing a very large Bowler moustache on the kid's face.

"Oh she was an acrobat's daughter...she swung by her teeth from a noose! Then one matinee, her bridgework gave way and she flew through the air like a goose!" GIR sang out, promptly grabbing bounding through the window, jumping off Dib's head to land in his room and reach into his chest compartment, pulling out fifty bucks to Gaz and giving them to her.

"Thaaaanks." She said with a smile as she leapt back out through the window, heading for his home as Dib wiped his face off.

"Did GIR PAY you for the permission to draw on my face?!!" Dib reasoned.

"Whiner." Gaz muttered, rolling her eyes and heading downstairs, off to go make a "special stop". Dib raised his hand up.

"Gaz?"

"Just...don't." She insisted. She didn't want him to come. Didn't want him to talk about it. Didn't want him to even THINK about it. She calmly headed down the stairs, the ring around her finger pulsing slightly as she walked out the door.

Dib sighed and headed to his computer, which had booted up to the Intergalactic Net. He was pirating galactic web from Zim's house thanks to an upgrade his dad had so generously installed and was trying to check on the latest auctions for interstellar items. Mainly, technology he could use to help make Zim's life as difficult as possible.

Plus, he was waiting for a pair of special see-through goggles. X-Ray, Infrared, Radar...

Wait. What was this? Somebody was auctioning off an "Onslaught-Class" starship...and not just
ANY Onslaught-Class starship...

Somebody was selling The Massive itself!

...  

...  

... 

"...they're gonna make this my fault." Senior told his charges as he slapped his gloved hand to his face, looking at the place where the Massive HAD been parked as Feyr examined the people chained to the nearby railing of the parking garage, Red and Purple shaking with anger, turning very, VERY pale with rage, antannae and lips a-quiver. "I just KNOW it."

"What kinda sick being steals a ship but doesn't even bother to let it's prisoners go free?" Jayd wished to know, his black eyes shimmering with concern as he glanced over at the prisoners Feyr was standing by.

"That's actually kind of amusing." Pech spoke up, chuckling slightly as her enormously thick orange jetpack jingled with her laughter. "My kind of thief!"

Sude, still QUITE untouchable or audible to any of the others save for Senior, carefully tiptoed behind Red and Purple as they turned around to glare at Senior, the draconic entity of Life raising his hands up and imitating a puppeteer, with the Tallests as his puppets.

"Funny or not...our SHIP is GONE! OUR ship! All because of your day off!" Red growled at them, pointing an accusing claw as Sude raised his "arm" rope, making a mocking frowny face. "You're going to pay DEARLY for this!"

"We'd make you do "The Electric Chair" but there's no stinkin' chairs around!" Purple added. "And who had access to the ship anyway? Huh?!" He asked, putting his hands on his hips, Sude imitating him as Senior began to giggle. "Huh?! Huh?! Huh?!?"

"N-n-no-nobody-hee-hee-hee..." Senior giggled, bursting into laughter as he held his sides, the others looking at him like he was insane.

"What're YOU thinking about?!!" Red snapped.

"Oh just...puppets." Senior wheezed out, wiping a tear from his eye as Red's eyes glittered.

"Good idea. PUT ON A PUPPET SHOW FOR US." He demanded, slamming his fist into his palm as Senior gulped.

"Uh...puppet...show? Er...okay..." He gulped. "But I've not got any puppets."

"A PAK with no PUPPETS in it!? SHAME!" Purple insisted, shaking his fist at Senior. "You get a PUMMELING!"

An instant later, tiny hammers popped up on springs from the communication officer's PAK, bonking him over the head as Senior fell to the ground, "ow-ing" and "ooh-ing" over and over.
"Wow, voice-activated pummeling system in every PAK, regulated only to the Tallest's voices? Nice." Sude admitted as Peech reached into a compartment in her jetpack, pulling out some studly-looking puppets as Jayd got out some of his own from his considerably large belt, joining Nick in the puppet show.

"Say, Zimma-diah, ya think there's any big ol' space worms in this cave?" Senior said in a country-hick-style voice, holding up two puppets of, ironically, Zim. One in a bad shirt, the other in a dress for some strange, strange reason. What sort of lunatic would take the time to make TWO kinds of Zim puppets, let alone one with a dress?

"I dunno, Zim-thro!" Senior squeaked out in a falsetto. "Let's take a look-OHMYGODASPACEWORM!" He cried out, Jayd going "nom-nom-nom" as he "ate" the puppets a few moments later, Red and Purple whooping it up. Anything involving anyone looking remotely like Zim getting hurt was funny to them.

Plus...puppets.

"I guess we'll have to move to the palace." Red supposed as Jayd and his boss then did a puppet rendition of "Tallest Grapa's Electrocution Incident". "It HAS been a while since we were able to just sit back and relax there."

"But we'd have to sleep in separate rooms!" Purple whined. "You KNOW I don't do well alone." He clung to Red then, purple eyes brimming with tears as he whined like a puppy.

"I've gotten you your favorite night liiiight..." Red said in a sing-song voice, patting Purple's head as he pulled out a big smiley face'd version of himself, which lit up and glowed with gentle light when you plugged it into the wall.

"Aww, you always know what I like." Purple cheerily remarked as Jayd struggled not to say it, but couldn't keep it in.

_Don't do it, Jayd. Don't-

"The Ambiguously Gay Duooool!" Jayd laughed out loud.

KRAKA-THROOOOOM! Lightning promptly zapped him from out of the clear sky above and he coughed slightly, wiping the soot off his body as Feyr unchained the last of the prisoners.

"Does that...happen often?" May Nar inquired as she looked over at Senior.

"...I wish I could say "no"." The communications officer admitted to her, frowning slightly. He was CERTAIN he'd seen her somewhere before, and not just on the news. It was like...he knew her. REALLY knew her. But how?

Jayd noticed a considerable scrape on the Vortian's leg, frowning slightly as he approached, gently kneeling by it. "Here, let me heal this." He insisted politely, placing one hand over it as the Vortian looked on in surprise. It was so strange...the tubes connected from his PAK to his gloves were now filling with a strange, multicolored cloud of tiny particles that passed from his glove over the wound, like a shimmering, gentle mist.

"Nanogenes." Jayd explained to the mystified Vortian. "Be it near-death or just a scratch, as long as I've gotten a template for a living organism integrated into my PAK's matrices, I can cure any being.
Plus, everybody likes the tingle."

"It's true. They do." Purple said, rubbing the back of his neck and turning visibly red as he thought up a way for him to injure himself later in the day. Hey, he could stop ANYTIME he wanted!

"Might I be allowed to make an inspirational speech, sirs?" Senior requested politely as Red and Purple looked him over.

"...why not? This could be good for a laugh." Red mused, rubbing his chin as he raised an invisible eyebrow. Senior was ALWAYS making inspirational speeches to the workers on the massive: they were often grade-A cheesecake. So much so that they'd come up with a drinking game: take one shot every time he uses a tired, worn-out cliché. Purple whistled for several assistants to bring them alcohol and they sat down on the backs of several unfortunates who were being forced to be used as stools for the Tallest.

Senior cleared his throat, Dite rolling her eyes as he began. "I know all of you expect me to say I'll always be a brave and courageous and noble leader. That I'll be the perfect inspirational figure for you and the right sort of person to emulate. That I can protect you from anything that'll befall you here. That I can save everyone."

"DRINK!" Purple giggled, downing one beer.

Senior ignored them and his antennae lowered, drooping slightly as he held one hand over his chest, sighing slightly as the others looked on in surprise. "Well, that isn't going to happen, because your Senior is a weak, WEAK being. But...but I'm good enough to promise this."

He gestured at all of them, his kindly eyes looking out across the empty garage. "I will be there. I'll be afraid. Confused, even. But I WILL be here with all of you, experiencing everything you go through. If NOTHING else...I will try to be by your side, even if I can't protect you from everything that'll attempted to be stuck into yours."

None of them spoke, all of them quietly looking at him before Jayd quietly clapped his hands together, nodding at Senior. "I liked it, sir." He said.

"It was honest...if nothing else." Xeil admitted, pulling down her communication's garb face mask to smile slightly at her boss.

"Thanks for keeping the clichés low, sir." Dite grumbled.

"Your kind words are always helpful." Feyr agreed, a look of sympathy flashing across his face.

Peech nervously tugged around an imaginary necklace as she flashed a slight, fake grin. "Yeah, yeah, uh...real nice...real nice..." She trailed off, a guilty expression flickering across her face, orange eyes slowly gazing down to stop at the ground.

"Yeah, yeah, let's save sittin' around singing campfires and all that crap for some time when OUR SHIP ISN'T STOLEN. Come on!" Tallest Red yelled out, clapping his hands together. "We're headed to the palace!"

"Uh, yay?" The many workers on the Massive mumbled, Purple sighing as well. Evidently he LIKED sitting on communication assistant's backs.
"...there's an "Orange Julius" on the waaaaay!" Red mumbled, folding his arms and rolling his eyes.

"YAAAAAY!"

Sude's frown, however, made Senior lose his happy grin. "What is it?" He whispered as they headed down the street towards the palace of the Tallest.

"The Entity of Love, Jourmungdr, is...dangerous." The draconic being whispered back as they kept walking. "And I've been sensing his presence growing stronger and stronger every minute I've been on this planet. I think he's been here longest out of all the others!"

"But he's the Entity of LOVE. What's scary about that?!" Senior inquired, looking skeptical as he tilted his perfectly-round head to the side, Feyr happily introducing May to the other prisoners from the Massive, chatting it up with them all.

"He/She's not simply motivated by love, but by the absence of love."

"But he's not Chulainn, right? He wouldn't KILL us or anything because we're not shiny-happy-people, right?" Senior inquired, becoming slightly pale.

"Oh, no...NO!" Sude laughed nervously, pausing for a few moments. "...yes."

"...okay, uh...er..." Senior gulped. "I'll think of something!"

...

...

...

...GIR was slightly confused that his master wasn't at home, but he didn't mind it TOO much. Plopping down in front of the television with a bag of chocolate-covered popcorn, he decided to waste the rest of the afternoon with his favorite television program, the "Scary Monkey Show".

There's really not much else to say about the show. Seriously.

"I LOVE this show." GIR decided for the eighteenth millionth time as he munched away at his popcorn bag, momentarily turning his head to in the kitchen: Torque Smacky was tied to the table and there was a bucket filled with some kind of hypnotic soup that Zim had been testing. He wanted to introduce it to the school's cafeteria, to get everyone to do his will, but unfortunately there was going to be nothing but hot dogs and corn chips for the next week. And then the week after it would be hot dogs and potato chips.

Zim would simply have to wait three weeks until he could disguise his new, evidently VERY successful stew as creamed corn, because apparently Torque thought he was Clodah Rogers, and kept singing.

"I'm...just...a...jack-in-the-box! I go wherever love knocks! I'm gonna jump up and down on my spring!" He kept singing out as GIR frowned slightly, eyes turning red.

"I'M A-TRYIN' TO WATCH MY SHOW!" He yelled. "Stupidhead!" He snapped, grabbing ahold of the nearby lamp and tossing it through the air. It sailed across the room and into the kitchen,
whacking Torque on the head and making him realize exactly where he was.

"Wh-what the...GET ME OUTTA HERE!" He yelled out. "What have you done to me? What have you done?!"

GIR frowned darkly and walked into the kitchen, getting out a hammer from the nearby drawer near the sink and hopping onto the table, holding it high.

"AAAAAAA!!"

THWUCKA-THONK!

"Thanks, I needed that..." Torque grumbled out, slipping into unconsciousness as GIR, satisfied, ripped Torque off the table and tossed him out the window to land in the rose bushes, heading back for his TV show to see-

A robotic being standing there, holding a ring with a yellow glow to it.

"INTRUDER!" GIR growled out, eyes transforming back to red, his forehead popping open as several large cannons suspended on mechanical wires shot up from within, aiming squarely at the feminine being.

"Don't you want this ring? This...SHINY ring?"

"...yes, it SURE is shiny..." GIR mumbled, his eyes becoming a cheery blue once again as the guns retracted and he inched closer...closer...

"Does GIR WANT the shiny ring?"

"GIR wants shiny very much." GIR whispered as Miyu smiled, sweet like darkest poison, handing him the ring as he slipped it onto one of his tiny fingers.

"GIR...you have the ability to inspire great fear. Welcome to my corps." Miyu laughed coldly, golden-yellow light shooting up around GIR's body as he was transfigured before her eyes, golden plates sliding onto his arms, yellow "boots" appearing on his feet and his chest and arms changing from blue to shades of yellow as well as his eyes, which now were alit with keen artificial intelligence.

"Amazing...AMAZING." He whispered, looking over his body. "The power...UNLIMITED POWEEEEERRRR!" He roared out, rising into the air on flashy yellow lightning, cackling madly. "I'm gonna blow stuff up now!" He added cheerily, popping out through the window and waving goodbye as Miyu chuckled darkly. Sure, he might be seen.

But if he was seen...he'd just kill. Problem solved. What she didn't know, though, was that another thought was popping inside of GIR's head...a desire to go visit Gazzy and show off, since she was such a favorite of the robots. He wanted to hold onto her, GIR decided. After he'd killed her brother and father, he'd make sure to keep her alive, and when she died, he'd put her beautiful eyes in a mason jar...

But meanwhile, not far away, a quiet, careful figure concentrated, whispering quietly as he too thought of that same purple-haired girl formed in his head. This sort of spell took careful concentration...
"Come on...I call you forth...I call you forth...I call you forth...I call you forth..." He murmured and murmured, carving into his body the necessary runes, dark blood dribbling down his arms and chest as he held his hands up high. "I call you forth...I CALL YOU FORTH..."

...  
...  
...

... "I couldn't think of anything!!!" Senior moaned, tugging down on his antennae as they made their way towards the palace. Indeed, it was a beautiful structure, shimmering silver in the middle of a beautiful sea of purplish ground. There were dozens of columns lining the front entrance with images of famous Irkens inscribed on the columns, the pillars of the past being the pillars that held the palace's high roof up.

Most noticeable of all, though, were the flags that flung from the top, high banners of varying colors by several spires. One was green, another white, the other blue...symbols of the grand philosophy of the Irken race: Sacrifice for the Empire, Faith in it's Leaders and the Ambitious Will to Survive and Succeed.

"I can FEEL him. He's IN here." Sude murmured into Senior's lack of ear, eyes widening. "Hiding...waiting...waiting to KILL!"

"Kill?!" Senior gulped inside his head.

"Just bein' overly dramatic. Sounds better than "do nasty things"." Sude commented calmly as they strode inside the set of double doors, the Tallest snapping their "fingers" as a red carpet was rolled out for them, a white-labcoat-wearing scientist with blue eyes bowing as he knelt before the Tallest as they ascended to the stairs.

"It is ALWAYS a pleasure to have you come back, my all-powerful Tallest." Trivvik, aka Trik, Head Scientist of the Research and Development Department for the Irken Military insisted as he gestured at the many other ornately-decorated scientists, cooks, servants and guards in the palace. "We're ready for whatever order you have to give."

"We wanna eat food. We just stopped at an Orange Julius but we want something very cheesy. I'm talkin' three heart attacks in one serving." Purple insisted.

"You heard the man!" Red snapped, clapping his hands. "THREE heart attacks!"

"One, two...five?" Trik inquired.

"THREE."

'Three." Trik whistled sharply and the chefs quickly zipped to the kitchens as Trik clasped his clawed hands together. "Anything else, sir?"

"We need our feet rubbed." Red added, he and Purple walking off as the many former inhabitants of the Massive looked at each other, Senior sighing.
"I suggest we all find rooms and get some rest." He told them all, stretching his arms wide as he watched Feyr sneak off with the prisoners in tow, eyes narrowing. "...follow him, right?"

"Hell to the yeah, I believe is the term." Sude murmured, Senior slinking after Feyr and the prisoners, down a hallway to see-

Gone. He'd just...vanished.

"Where the...?" Senior glanced left and right in the labyrinthine hallway. "Where is he?"

"Count the doors." Sude ordered immediately.

"...six, there's six-"

"SEVEN. Look in the corner...of...your...eye." Sude murmured as green eyes slowly turned...more...more...

There. A perception filter had kept it hidden, but there it was...a slight pinkish glow emanating from underneath, light curling it's claws beneath the door. Senior grit his teeth as he opened it up, and his eyes and mouth widened in shock.

"WHAT...THE...HELL?!?" He screamed out.

The room was an enormous structure with hundreds upon hundreds of crystallized coffins of some kind, containing various alien beings. Some were Irken, others Vortian, some Meekrob, or Screw-Head and some even humanoid in appearance. Real Earthlings? Here? On Irk?

And standing in the middle of the room, suspended in the air by a pinkish energy construct formed around it like a giant artist's drawing rigging, was an enormous cobra-esque being. It was looking around the top ring of crystallized prisoners, removing something glittering from it's mouth time and time again and popping them across the wall, the glittering gems expanding into crystal prisons as they embedded deep in the walls. It turned it's head, noticing their presence and nodded over in the direction of-

Feyr. He was there, with the prisoners...all of whom were crystallized. He removed one such tiny gem from his own mouth, putting it to the wall as it expanded to reveal a Vortian female. May was the only one not yet crystallized, she was clinging behind an enormous sapphire pillar, one of many that held the room up, her own pink eyes widening as Feyr turned, smiling at Senior.

"It appears the secret's out." Feyr mused, shrugging as his appearance began to shift and shimmer, changing into a vaguely dress-like outfit, complete with a tiara and gloves, all shades of pink and white. And, for some reason, a slate of chest armor that allowed his...BELLY BUTTON to be shown?

What in...HOW? Unless...he was a NATURAL Irken? What ELSE had he been hiding? As Senior looked upon Feyr, Sude shimmering into full visibility by him, the communications officer shivered. Why had he never seen the dark intensity lurking behind Feyr's eyes? This snake in the grass had been hiding for so long in his garden...why had he not known?

"Because you didn't want to." His inner voice whispered.

"Jourmungdr...it's been a long time." Sude spoke loudly as May inched over to Senior, instinctively
preferring the Irken that WASN'T trying to turn her into a piece of wall art.

"Time has been kind to you, as it has to me. Too bad you didn't emerge sooner. I've been here on Irk for centuries with my children the Consulars." Jourmungdr said, in a voice half feminine, half masculine. It bowed it's hooded head, stars sparkling within the hood as the insignia of Love shone brightly atop the cloth hanging over his...her...forehead. "I am Jourmungdr, little host. Don't be astonished by my appearance or my ways. Once all of these beings have seen the light, they shall be found."

"What "light" is that?" Senior demanded to know, clenching his fist tightly and shaking it at the snake. "You're keeping them prisoner and...and what have you done to Feyr?"

"All of them are having the embers of Love reignited within them. Just like Will and Rage and Fear and the others, everyone, and I do mean EVERYONE...is capable of feeling love to a degree." Jourmungdr intoned, pulling one crystal off the wall as it grew in size, gently stroking an Irken cheek. "In the case of the Irkens, who threw away their ability to spread love with others, I am bringing back their body's ability to freely love."

"You're MUTATING Irkens..." Senior murmured, eyes widening as he stepped back in horror. "Forcing them to gain sexual organs for your needs?"

"Your definition of "mutation" is incorrect. Think of it as bringing back what once was. REPAIRING, if you will." Feyr explained. "At one point, we Irkens were hermaphroditic, we bred freely with any beings we wanted. Survival was all that mattered, and we didn't care who bore our children. We must return to the flesh, my Senior." Feyr told him, suddenly striding to his boss's face and caressing his cheek, sweetly smiling, every syllable dripping with tender poison. "Return to our old ways. Jourmungdr wants all beings to embrace love. You have it in you. I can see it."

For a brief moment, Senior felt a terrible, harsh pain in his chest. It was as if his heart literally had been punched. He found himself momentarily glancing over in the direction of Lard Nar's sister as she glanced at him, as if seeing something else in him. "I...I..."

"Within you is a great amount of love and compassion for your kind...and for other species. You come from a time when we were allies with others...your tolerance towards them allowed the seeds of love to spread. You would make a fine mate for HER, I'd imagine." Feyr mused, glancing back at May.

"I want you to leave her alone and let these people GO." Sude insisted. "You cannot FORCE love on others."

"Sude..." Jourmungdr sighed and shook his/her head. "If a being is in a crisis and refuses to acknowledge it...you know only outside intervention shall save them. I will be that intervention. Please...don't stand in my way."

"I don't have a choice." Sude growled, putting one clawed hand on Senior's chest. "Senior...time for you to say my Oath! It is time for you to accept my blessing fully, and rise in light with the power of the White Rose!"

...
...GIR had been in the middle of a snacking spree at the nearby Pet Store when he'd noticed Gaz sneaking through a nearby alley. Putting his face up to the window, he watched her scuttle across the street, heading into the nearby cemetery.

Wait. The cemetery? GIR frowned slightly, yellow eyes narrowing. "What is she...?"

He moved smoothly out of the pet store, following after her, intent on figuring out what she was up to, wiping his mouth free of blood and fur, eyes widening at the sight of her pulling her coat away. She was now fully in her armor, all red and black and concentrating.

"Come on...come ON!" She snarled as she stood before a gravestone, pointing her red ring at the grave as it shimmered brightly. "Bring her BACK!" She yelled. "BRING HER BACK!"

With that...it WORKED. A burning red fire shot forth as blood dribbled down from her mouth, and her eyes widened as the fire seeped into the ground...and her mother's skeletal form rose, holding a hand to her cheek. "Wh-what's...what's going on?" She murmured out. "GUAAAAHH!" She hit the ground, panting and heaving, dry-vomiting as she struggled to stand.

No skin...no muscles...no eyes, a faint red glow around her body, but...some hair left...and her voice. Her mother's voice.

"Amazing. A rotting sack of bones and tumors and all she can feel is love..." GIR whispered, hiding behind a tree some distance away, eyes widening in surprise as Gaz's ring began to form the flesh and hair for Gaz, her mother nervously looking around, one hand holding her head.

"Mom? Mom?" Gaz whispered, clinging to her mother and looking deep into her eyes. "Do you know where you are? Do you know who I am?"

"G-Gaz...Gazlene? Is...that you?" Peggy Membrane inquired, eyes widening at her daughter.

"Yes...YES." Gaz felt the tears come, but did nothing to halt them. Screw the laws of life and death. Fuck anybody who would dare to laugh at her weeping like a little girl. Gaz felt just fine. BETTER than fine. And more importantly...so was her mother.

"I...feel so...strange." Peggy murmured as GIR approached nervously, Gaz glancing over at him, not really caring about his new outfit. "I...I can't remember much." She mumbled.

"It's okay, take your time. This is a friend of mine. He came here to see you, RIGHT?" Gaz asked, glaring slightly over at GIR, who eagerly nodded.

"Your daughter's a FINE young lady." GIR said quickly, nodding enthusiastically as Peggy felt her daughter's cheek. "You were sick but she made you aaaaaalll better."

"I...I don't think..." Peggy mumbled as she clutched her head. "This...I'm sorry, this..." Her eyes grew wide. "This isn't RIGHT." She gasped out. "What did you DO, Gazzy? I'M NOT RIGHT. What did you DO?" She demanded.

"I brought you back." Gaz said, confusion flickering in her eyes. "Mom, I SAVED you."

"You saved a SHELL of me, baby." Peggy whispered, taking Gaz's cheek, a mournful expression
coming over her face. "This isn't the way things were meant to be. I'm so sorry...the truest part of me is already gone. And..." She shook her head slowly back and forth, her voice dropping in tone. "...and you know that...don't you?"

Gaz stared for a long time at her mother before she finally covered her face with her hands, closing her eyes. "I..." She whispered. "...I..."

With that...she was gone. GIR helped Gaz lower her mother's body back into the coffin as the Earth returned to normal and Gaz placed a single, tear-stained hand over the cold ground, GIR sitting nearby on his knees, a deep, mournful expression on his usually-jovial face.

"...your rage is subsiding over the form of the one who caused it."

"...I kept blaming Dad...I kept blaming Dib...and I kept blaming Mom. But...it was MY fault." Gaz whispered out. "...because I wasn't strong enough to just...let go. I..."

She gritted her teeth, the tears trickling down her cheeks as she sobbed. "I can't do this anymore. I...I just...I just wanna start over."

"Gazzy..." A familiar voice whispered. GIR and Gaz's head whipped in the direction of a fully-clothed, and VERY much alive form. There, purple hair flowing gently in the breeze was Peggy Membrane standing proud, hands clasped, a look of love on her maternal face. "Oh, Gazzy...you CAN start over."
The Yellow had waited for the others to walk off, momentarily sneering over at the Green as it glared at her. It was, in a sense, somewhat sad. Intelligence and Will had birthed the Irken race. What had been love had turned to hate, and the Green, which stood for Will, hated what the Yellow had become.

It gave her a "I'm watching you" look before sprinting off, following after Senior, and the host for Fear, transformed element of Intelligence, sneered as it snuck into a private room, bringing forth an energy construct to contact the Blue, the Wing of the Resisty...

"Hope...Psyche...looking well." The "Talon" to Hope's "Wing" said calmly, steepling it's claws as Psyche's host glowered underneath her hood on the vid screen before the Yellow, before Pahnyk, the entity of Fear. Psyche fluttered over her host as the tall female Irken dropped the hood down.

"Am I speaking to "him" or to you?"

"...now...it is me." An all-too-familiar voice inquired, as the Yellow licked it's hosts lips. "I was feeling a bit peckish. Want to come out to dinner with me? I'll invite some nice people to a party and eat them."

"..."

"Why join with the Resisty? Trying to atone for national guilt through individual action? After all that YOU'VE done? You've got blood on your hands, my blue-eyed darling."

"...I..." The female Irken sounded truly sad as she glanced slightly away from the Yellow's accusing eyes. "...I did what I thought was RIGHT..." She spoke quietly. "Can you truly say the same?"

"Survival is the only thing that matters. All else is secondary. And I didn't get this far, surviving being eaten alive, to see you and your ragtag group of idiots win."

"I KNOW you're the one who told Avarice's deputy where the Massive was, I know how he towed it away, but that was stupid. He can't get inside. How's he going to sell something he can't get inside of?"

"He just needs a sample of DNA from the current Tallests, as per the ships's computer matrices. So I called him up and made a suggestion." Xeil, the host of the Yellow, calmly laughed. "They just need a piece of Red and Purple's body. They won't need their, say, HEAD!"

Zim was astonished to see the form lying in the bed before him at the palace that floated above the city. She looked so damn FAMILIAR. He was CERTAIN he'd seen her somewhere before. Greenish fur/skin...long black hair...golden-amber eyes...a red t-shirt and...some kind of choker around her neck?

But...she seemed pale. Very pale. And sweating heavily.
"Her very appearance and voice are changing the longer her world, our tether, stays dead." Zerinim Two murmured. "And our memories of her and our home are fading.I'm...I'm even beginning to forget her name. I can't even remember my maneem's name..."

"I...I feel like I know her." Zim murmured, scratching his head. "Tell me!" He demanded, grabbing Miyu's chest and shaking her. "Who is she?"

"Look." Miyu spoke calmly, pointing up. "Command: Look into...the Schism."

Zim's body stiffened as he turned his head, looking up, hearing a sound like the rapid beating of a drum, his ruby/maroon eyes widening as he gazed up into a split open THING, something that looked like God himself had taken a knife and sliced open a piece in time and space. It pulsed with energy, a strange light spilling out, falling onto Zim as-

"MIKEEEEELY!"

"You didn't mean to do a lot of things."

"What if he CAN'T change?"

"I think of you...and let it go..."

"Look at King Midas! Everything he touches turns to CRAP!"

"Everyone was going to love us..."

"Yes. Yes, they are. You are wise!"

"I AM ZIIIM!"

"I will always love-"

Zim's eyes shot wide open and he panted heavily, falling to his knees as he began to dry heave the contents of his stomach up, the others nervously standing by as Zim slowly turned his head, getting up and walking over to the being in the bed, taking her paw as she turned to gaze at him.

"...it's me." He said. "It's ME. I remember."

Her face broke into a smile as he leaned in close, and hugged her tight, tears springing to his eyes as Two and Miyu watched on, a small smile spreading across their faces. Their father remembered. Remembered every adventure he'd ever had, would have, COULD have. And what had floated to the forefront...was his desire to be with her, to be with the ones that were his family, his friends, his comrades.

Yeah, it was all about him, in a sense, Miyu reasoned as Zim began to catch up with...Cass?...yes, she thought it was Cass...

But it was a childlike, forgivable kind, and they loved him for it.
"Oh, Sude, your host is new to this. Do you really think he can HOPE to match me? I'm not even your worst threat." Jormungdr said calmly, folding his arms as Feyr and Senior circled each other. "Chulainn's men are far more violent and less kind than I, and all of them have the same attitude, same powers...same HORRIBLE taste in dress. I mean, shoulder-wings? REALLY?"

"My host can do this!" Sude insisted, patting Senior on the shoulder as May watched on, blinking slowly. She was SURE she'd seen him before. Something about him was just so...familiar. So very familiar. "You can do this. Just believe in yourself. Hunker down, and pull on through and-

"Please, leave the cliché'd speech to ME, I get enough of it outta my own mouth." Senior groaned, rolling his eyes. "And what's this "oath" you're talking--"

He blinked. Wait. Somewhere in the back of his mind, it was bursting through...ringing in his ears.

"You know it. When we first connected, we began to share our thoughts and feelings and desires. Now I'm sharing the most important words you'll ever speak." Sude said proudly. "...make me proud, "son". He whispered, gently hugging Senior before hovering back, Jormungdr doing the same to allow their respective fighters breathing room.

"Here goes." Senior murmured, a white blaze flying off his body as his ring proudly shone upon his gloved hand. He held it high, fists clenched as his outfit began to shift, morphing into something new...he soon became cloaked in blinding white, blazing like a star...

"In Brightest Day, through Blackest Night, No other blaze will burn as bright! Let those who try to halt what's right...burn like my power...WHITE LANTERN'S LIGHT!"

Now what stood before them was an Irken in a white, fairly tight-fitting armor with silverfish-tipped ends to his pant legs and tipless gloves. He wore a silverbelt with small ring-like clasps coming off his shoulders and sides like attached halos, and a similar batch of artificial halos topped his head. He looked very much like he deserved to have wings, and a peaceful expression fell across his face, that familiar, welcome feeling of unbridled joy and bliss rising in him. It was like meeting Sude all over again.

"My Lord, my God...this is...incredible..." He murmured, looking down at his hands as a glowing white light slowly rose from his body, like steam rising from one fresh out of a hot bath. "I feel like I can do ANYTHING!"

"My boy...you can." Sude said gently, nodding firmly as Nick shot forward at Feyr.

...Gazlene Membrane and GIR gaped at the sight before them, a should-be-dead Peggy Membrane walking towards them. Gaz glanced back at her mother's grave, then at her mother as she stammered slightly. "What-the...what's...how in...Mom?"
"Not exactly. Not the one you know. Not just yet." Peg said kindly, shaking her head back and forth. "I'm from an alternate Earth, honey. A place where your brother grew up to be so damn strong. And no matter how rough things were..."

Peg held up a glowing red crystal as an image appeared above it, shimmering into existence to reveal a pleasant city. "The sun always managed to shine. Matthew was always a smart scientist, but he went beyond that. He learned to truly care about you and Dib. He moved past my death, opened his heart and mind, allowing Dib to pursue his own interests, and in the end, Dib even found love of his own in Hawaii. It was there that he found a way to bring me back...back to him."

Gaz found the tears coming on again. Her parents? Alive and together again? A happy family? No more weirdness, no more grief? She had so, SO wanted that after her mother had died...so...SO wanted that...

"How did you get here?"

"The Schism has opened to this world, the Base world of Universe IZ." Peggy told her daughter as images of multiple Earths branching out from a single Earth shifted into view above the red crystal she held. "It's allowed beings from parallel Earths to come here, to the place where the Seeds of Potential lie. This world can give birth to so many amazing worlds...it can bring back the happy world I came from..."

Peggy embraced her daughter, and Gaz breathed in the scent of her mother's hair anew as she found herself eagerly returning the hug. "The world that died can come back with your help. I can come back. The Earth of BS was a better, brighter world, Gazzy. Everyone'll be replaced, but they'll better. I'd never lie to you."

Gaz held her mother tightly, listening to her beating heart as she took in deep breaths, a question bubbling to her lips, quiet and soft.

"Am...am I a better person on your Earth than I am here? Now?" Gaz asked, stepping back as GIR scratched his head.

Peggy's face became pained as she looked away. "...no." She murmured. "...you're not."

"I didn't think so." Gaz said quietly. "...it would have been nice...it really would have."

And with that, she leveled her ring at her mother. "I can't let you replace this world! I won't let you change things, won't let you change ME!"

"You'd NEVER be able to kill me. Come on, baby, put the ring down." Peggy said angrily, frowning at her.

"NO." Gaz snapped.

"You will LISTEN to your mother-"

"My mother never made any demands of me!" Gaz yelled out, as crimson energy swirled around her, forming into a focal point. She gripped it firmly, a chainsaw humming to life in her gloved hand as she launched forward at the thing that was not her Mother. The thing snarled and leapt forth at her, red energy dripping off IT'S body as Gaz let out a bellowing cry, GIR eagerly grinning.
"Ooh! I wish I'd brought some popcorn!" He then smacked his head. "DUH!"

PING! In an instant he was sitting in a movie chair with a soda and a bunch of popcorn, all formed of yellow energy. He took a sip, then sighed, putting the soda down. "Lemonade. I HATE lemonade!" He pouted, smacking his powerful, tiny fists against his seat handles.

All were unaware that Dib was celebrating, pacing his room and eagerly awaiting the Massive. HIS bid had been the one that had won. It had been tough, he admitted, paying for sale of an Onslaught-Class battle cruiser, but it had helped that he'd figured out how to hack into Zim's account. Hey, Zim had more zeroes!

And it would soon be delivered to his backyard. The auction organizer had specified that he would disguise the vehicle to make it invisible to the naked eye, so-

DIIIING DOOONG!

"The front doooooor." Dib whispered, rushing out of his room and bounding down the stairs, pushing open the front door as a red-haired, nicely-skinned young woman stood there in a delivery woman's outfit, holding up a clipboard.

"Hi, I'm Mrs. Knightly. My husband Mr. White and I are the ones that totally jacked-up the Massive. We've parked it above your house, it's the cloud shaped like the Loch Ness Monster, we thought you'd like that judging by your Ebay profile info."

"Oooh." Dib eagerly signed off on the clipboard as Mrs. Knightly brushed back some of her red hair, smiling at him. There was something...odd about her. Something familiar. It was sort of like he was looking at his sister Gaz all over again, but he couldn't quite figure out WHY.

"Listen, at the moment, you can't get inside. There's a security protocol that prohibits any foreign entry and flight by unauthorized personnel unless a DNA sample of the current Tallests is present. So my husband's gone to go get said sample so you can fly the thing as you please." Mrs. Knightly said. "...by the way, your sister, Gaz..."

Dib glanced up at her. "You know her?"

"We saw HER profile. She's bid on some of our games. Listen, I just saw her at the graveyard with a psychopathic robot that's glowing yellow for some reason and a woman with long purple hair that said she was her mother just appeared and hugged her in a Hallmark moment. That normal for you Earthlings, cuz we Aroseans don't really have much to brag about on our planet."

"...yeah...it's normal." Dib said, eyes widening, face becoming pale. "...our...dead mothers c-come b-back all...ALL the time! Yeah! Totally...oh HEEEEELLLL!!!" He yelled, racing off down the road. "NOW I HAVE TO SAVE HER!"

... ... ...

...elsewhere, Red was pacing up and down in their private room as Purple sat on the bed, nervously
scrunching up the blanket he was sitting on. Everything about the place was pretentious, flashy and gaudy-looking...in short, just the way the Tallest liked it. Even the clock nearby was a gaudy piece: overly thick clock hands with Red and Purple's mugs ticking down the seconds.

And don't even get me started on the wallpaper. All of it was clashing red and purple. Clearly, these two had a deep love within themselves the same way the Consulars had. Only instead of caring for other species a bit too deeply...they were waaaay too into themselves.

I know you're all expecting me to make a gay joke, but as Jayd already demonstrated, I'd get fried by lightning. So no, I'm not going to...

"I have something to tell you." Purple admitted as Red glanced over at him. "Something I've been keeping a secret for a long time."

"What?"

"...I'm pregnant."

...okay, you know what? Why not! THE AMBIGUOUSLY GAY-

"Did you just hear a thunderclap?" Red murmured, looking out the window as Purple scratched his head. "Don't make JOKES like that, it's not funny!"

"Aw, I thought the look on your face was pretty funny." Purple laughed as he stood up. "Actually, I wanted to talk to you about the Massive. Look, I KNOW you're upset about losing it, but I've been thinking up some ways we can punish Senior." He held up a small grocery-esque list and Red snatched it from his co-tallest's hand.

"...electric chair...but in midair? Staplers...red hot pokers...wait. Is this...an IRON MAIDEN?"

"Yep." Purple said cheerily, flashing his zipper-toothed teeth.

"You've been watching "The History Channel", haven't you?" Red laughed, clapping Purple on the back. "I guess our species DOES have something to learn from Earth after all!"

"I'm a single lady! I'm a single lady! I'm a single lady! I'm a single lady!"

Purple nervously blushed as he activated his wrist-gauntlet's built-in communicator. "Y'ello, it's Tallest Purple! Talk to me!"

"I've got a message for you."

"...who is this?"

"Wanna guess what it is?"

"What's the message?"

"Look out the window, Big P."

Purple paled as he creakingly turned his head to gaze out the window, Red following his gaze as they saw a white-haired humanoid being in black and orange standing there, grinning darkly as he
sat atop a swirling mass of orange energy formed from his ring. A dark orange glow was rising off him like a blazing inferno as Purple's hand quivered, the communicator slowly being lowered.

"Like I said...wanna guess what it is?"

"I think I have a few ideas." Purple squeaked out as he and Red barreled for the door, the wall being blown away as two bands of energy snatched them up and they were whisked through the air to the outdoors, their cries echoing through the palace.

"Oh, poor, poor Jimmy Olsen." Jayd murmured, the medic shaking his head back and forth as his nanogenes hovered around him, forming a vague shape that looked almost Irken, and almost feminine. "Everybody hates you but ME." He said, finishing up his copy of "All-Star Superman" that he'd snuck into his PAK.

Upon hearing his Tallest's cries, Jayd's head shot up, his black eyes widening as the nanogenes "glanced" down at him.

"We need to be there. NOW." He said, leaping through the air and kicking down the door as he raced into the Tallest's room, seeing the blown-open wall and the Tallest being strung up by a makeshift tree, a white-haired being with glittering pink eyes about to hang them.

"I'm gonna take your hands." The white-haired being explained. "That way my customer gets the DNA sample from you he wants AND he can make all sorts of little puns. Maybe he'll keep your hands in a little bubbly jar or something. That's always tasteful."

"Can't you just, uh, cut off one of our fingers and let us off with a warning? We promise not to go after our ship! Really! Pinky-swear! And it's one of the few fingers we have left!" Purple blubbered out.

"And cut off a body part with you still alive? That would hurt like HELL!" The orange-clothed being laughed.

"HEY!"

He and the Tallest's head snapped in the direction of a being now cloaked in green light, as a form, proud and tall, stood ready to fight. "Put them down."

"Or else what?" The orange-clothed being asked as the green form raised an accusatory claw high.

"Or else you answer to the GREEN FUCKING LANTERN!" Jayd roared out. "...woah. I went all 'Frank Miller' there." He blinked a few times before shrugging. "Oh well. It's "Miller" Time, I suppose...AND CLOBBERIN' TIME!"

And with that, he leapt through the air, an enormous green hammer SMACKING the orange-clothed being away from the Tallests as Jayd grinned proudly, he, the Host of the Green ready to do his Tallests proud.

Meanwhile, Gaz was taking a chainsaw to her now-utterly-batshit "mother", who's long purple hair had taken on a life of her own as GIR laughed maniacally, watching Gaz bitch-slap Peggy Membrane around the graveyard as Peg's hair flung spiked locks in her daughter's direction. It was like a "Jerry Springer" episode from Hell itself.
"This is turning out even better than I'd hoped!" GIR remarked as Gaz managed to cut into her "mom's" stomach. "Ha-ha! No guts, no glory!"

"Who knew you had the STOMACH for this kind of thing!" Peggy said wryly, her mouth splitting open as blackened tentacles lashed out and struck Gaz, knocking her clear through several tombstones as the school janitor grumbled, pushing Gaz off of him and out of the open grave he was in.

"I can't get ANY peace 'round here. F—kin' kids...even on my day off they make things difficult." Nny muttered balefully as he patted the skeletal form beneath him on the head, a worm slithering in and out of it's nose as a black ring glittered on his hand...a black Exemplar Ring the way Gaz had one of her own...

"Be back later, baby...aw, but you ain't goin' anywhere, are you?" He chuckled, climbing out of the grave as Gaz and Peggy whipped their heads in the direction of Nny as he held up a fist, black energy swirling around it as it shot forward at Gaz, knocking her into her mother as GIR gaped in surprise. "THAT'S for all the times you and your brother and your stupid friend knocked over stuff in my hallways!"

"The JANITOR'S got a ring too? What is this, did somebody puke a rainbow over the Earth?" Gaz mumbled as GIR clenched his fists tightly, standing up straight.

"Nobody hurts my Gazzy but ME!" He and Peggy yelled out, the two rushing forward, simultaneously punching Nny squarely in the chin as he was knocked through the air, crashing into another gravestone as he grunted, leaping forward, a scythe forming in his hands as all three of them began to brawl, Gaz leaping forth as he knocked GIR and Peg away, chainsaw held high.

"I know why you play all those damn games in my hallways. You're such a PIG yourself. I've seen you eating the same food all the time." Nny told her coldly. "Surprised you didn't get an orange ring, you little glutton."

"HEY! I never waste money on stupid things! Only on the BEST games, the BEST food!" Gaz yelled back at him, cutting across his chest, astounded at the sight of his wound healing before her eyes, flesh sewing itself back together via the black ring on his hand. He sneered and kicked her squarely in the nose, knocking her backwards as he jumped forward.

"EXACTLY, "Gazzy"! You inconvenience everyone else to make sure you get what you want! Your lunch HAS to be pizza, your snack HAS to be a pudding cup, you HAVE to have soda, and if you don't GET that, or if somebody takes them from you, well, Heaven help them!" Nny said coldly, shoving her to the ground and holding a burning-black hand up. "Always spending money on trivial plastic crap and your favorite junk food...not caring how much you spend or where it comes from or who needs it more..."

He dug his hand into her chest, gripping her heart as she screamed. "If that's not avarice, I don't know what...wait...WAIT!"

He frowned, reaching out in her chest. "...what the...where's your heart?!!"

Gaz promptly kicked him squarely in the crotch, his eyes bugging out as he howled, reeling back and clutching his privates as she kissed her ring. "This thing IS my heart." She told him, punching him squarely in the chin as he went flying into a nearby tree. "And I think I'll rip yours out! Turnabout IS fair play..."
Elsewhere, "Mr. White" was shooting across the ground, running at an incredibly fast speed as Jayd fired off plasma blasts from his ring, White cackling madly. "Can't catch me!" He called out, spinning around and around Red and Purple's tree as they let out loud, long groans, the world going topsy turvy as Red hiccupped slightly, Purple turning a darker shade of green.

"I think he's about to do a tango with the toilet." White snickered as he leapt backwards, clear over Jayd, firing off an orange blast of energy from HIS ring as Jayd was knocked through the air. The medic re-righted himself and shot forth a claw that gripped the white-haired being to the ground. "Multicolor yawn...Chuck, Ralph..."

"There's nothing funny about."

"Oh, no, no DON'T-"

Purple couldn't hold it in and he promptly...well...insert your favorite term for puking here.

"BLUEEEEEUUUGHHAAAKKKK!!""

"Pur, this was a brand new suit of armor!" Red complained, shaking his head back and forth.

"What did you EAT, my Tallests?" Jayd moaned, waving a gloved hand before his face, momentarily distracted in his disgust as White sneered, an orange energy construct of a giant hand shimmering to life behind the medic, whacking him away...

With a giant orange safe knocking him to the ground.

"Low-quality finish." Red told White as Jayd moaned, struggling to get out from underneath the safe, the white-haired humanoid approaching Red and Purple.

"You two are brimming with Avarice. Figures. Much like me, you want it all." White said as he snapped his fingers. In an instant a giant pair of shears appearing in his tipless-gloved hands as he grabbed Red and Purple's right and left arms respectively. "With the money I'm getting from selling your ship, my wife and I can go retire to Pokitaru."

"It IS nice this time of year, isn't it? And it's 342 days free of mutated sea critter attacks!" Purple agreed.

"See? Now PURPLE understands the importance of goofing off. Why can't you be more like your "brother"? I'm so disappointed in you, son." White mocked Red who stuck his tongue out defiantly at the humanoid, who raised the shears up. "Ah, well. Snip-snip!"

"Not...yet..." Jayd growled out, gloved hand clenching deep into the ground. "Not...YET!"

"Oh, don't bother." White remarked, looking back over at him and rolling his eyes as Jayd tried to lift the energy construct of the safe. "You can't lift that thing. Not in a bamillion years. No matter how many times you say "I think I can, I think I-"

"I...think...I...AAAAAAAN!" Jayd roared out, his muscles bulging as the nanogenes around him shot forth, and with an enormous EXPLOSION the safe was shattered into pieces. The Green Lantern stood triumphant as Red and Purple saw the Nanogenes take a definite form, a familiar form...
"...you." Red whispered. "...it's YOU?"

"It...can't...be..." Purple murmured.

"TAK?!!"

... ... ...

...GIR rubbed his head, turning to look at the unconscious form of Peggy...or at least, he HOPED she was unconscious. Gaz's chainsaw was pushing Nny's scythe back as the two glowered into each other, blazing red against heartless black, with...

Dib flying through the air, aiming squarely at Nny's back?

THUDDA-BLAM! Two powerful fists struck squarely into Nny's back as he let out a howl, Gaz sticking the chainsaw squarely into his chest and revving it up to full throttle. Nny shook like a milkshake before EXPLODING into chunks, Dib groaning in disgust as GIR blinked at the thing in his arms.

"Heh. GIR'S such a player." Gaz said with a slight chuckle as GIR waved his prize in the air, Dib sticking his tongue out in disgust. "See? He got a little head!"

"Here lies the usurper's cuuuuuursed head!" GIR cackled. "Ah, Macbeth...your arse is out the windee!"

With that, GIR drop-kicked the head across the cemetery as Gaz turned to see her mother's still form, Dib gasping in horror as he and Gaz raced to Peggy Membrane's side. Peg looked up at Dib, blinking slowly, none of them aware that a Beautiful Angel was approaching from behind.

"I'm...I'm not supposed to stay any longer. This...this is all the time I had." Peggy admitted quietly as Dib clutched her hand tightly.

"I...I just finally saw you again." Dib whispered. "C'mon, please...just a little longer, PLEASE..."

"Dib...it'll be alright." Peggy said, taking his cheek and smiling softly, turning to look at Gaz. "I'm just...sorry that...sorry that I got so angry with you, I...I think I passed on something I never meant to. I'm sorry you got that from me. But you can be better. I know you can."

"...I'll try." Gaz whispered.

"Try to forgive your brother, Gazzy." Peggy rasped out, her breath fading from her, her body becoming paler than usual as her eyelids drooped. "Forgive your father. Forgive your stupid, STUPID mother..." She coughed slightly, hacking before taking in several deep breaths. "Not everyone on my world was as strong as the ones here. Dib...you look like you've grown very, VERY strong...and Gaz...you became even better than I would have hoped. You cared about what happened to this world, even if only for a slightly selfish reason."

"But if changing the world means bringing you back-" Gaz began to say, speaking quickly,
"I don't WANT to come back...if it means you won't be the strong girl you are now." Peg insisted. "I DON'T. But listen. Please. Don't be too hard on Two and the others. They're doing it for their family, the way I wanted to do this for mine. It's wrong for them to change things, but..."

She began coughing madly and Dib nodded, Gaz sighing as she nodded in agreement as well. Yeah...they could understand. Two had said he would have done anything for his mother. They didn't agree with what those monsters were doing, didn't agree one bit, but...but they COULD understand...maybe even sympathize a little. Dib almost felt sorry for Two. Was he looking down at his mother right now? Watching...

Watching her...die...

And die she did, a smile on her face as a winged being gently knelt by her, Gaz and Dib barely noticing him as he took her in her arms. "...I'm sorry." He said. "I brought her back to speak with you. I didn't want...want your goodbye to be like this."

"...YOU brought her back?" Gaz asked, looking over at the Angel as it nodded, golden-amber eyes filled with sorrow. "...why?"

"You wanted to talk to her. And you too." He told Dib, nodding in the black-haired human's direction. "You wanted to be forgiven by each other. This was the only way that could happen. There were other ways I could have convinced you to fight for this world's sake, to help you become less selfish, but...but this way meant something. You would have fought for the wrong reasons, your heart wouldn't have been in it if I just told you what was happening the way your mother did. Now your heart WILL be in it...and you got to be with your mother again...see her...hold her. She didn't die alone, she died happy."

"I didn't want you to EXHUME her and drag her in front of my face!" Gaz yelled, standing up, eyes ablazing.

"It wasn't all about you. It was also about her." The Beautiful Angel said as Gaz stopped in place, looking down at her mother draped across the being's arms. "...and this was what SHE wanted."

Dib watched the Angel fly away with Peg's body, GIR giving a momentary sad smile at Gaz, waving goodbye as Dib put a hand on her shoulder. She yanked it away from him, body shuddering, her voice very soft, very low...very hurt.

"Just...just leave me alone. Not right now, okay?! Not...not right now."

With that, Dib nodded quietly, walking off, hands in his pockets as Gaz quietly sat by her mother's grave, with nothing but the wind to keep her company...

Both unaware that Nny's eyes had fluttered open, his body parts slowly inching back together...
"This isn't possible." Red murmured as White looked on in surprise. Now HE was under a giant safe, with Red and Purple being cut free by the unmistakable form of Irken Tak, albeit made entirely of the medical technology called nanogenes. Jayd humbly blushed as he gestured at her.

"It's her, sir. The Will needed a host spirit the way the Yellow did. It found a being clinging to life through sheer willpower alone and chose her the way that Fear chose a being who existed to make others fear him. Tak's will is one of the strongest in the galaxy's."

"Good to see you again, my Tallests. What can I say? I live to serve." Tak informed Red and Purple, the two now freed and blinking in surprise, mouths agape at the Irken before them. She bowed deeply, the nanogenes shifting constantly, yet always keeping that same basic shape of her. All were green in color, save for her eyes. Those remained purple, as usual.

"As the always say in the comic book industry, if you never find the body, they're not dead!" Jayd the Medic insisted, leading his Tallest back to the palace, ignoring White's struggling as the humanoid inched out from underneath the energy construct he was pinned beneath. "Cardinal Darithil didn't just send me the best reading material from Earth, he told me where she was out in space. Her old body had long-since faded, she needed a host. So I volunteered."

He took Tak's "hand" and kissed it. "Anything for a lady, you see."

"Is EVERYONE in the Empire falling in love with Earthling culture? What is this, a conspiracy?" Red murmured.

KRUCHA-THROOOOM! An enormous pink cobra was knocked through the air and over their heads, landing squarely on White as he let out a "OH, C'Moooooon", a pink-clothed being climbing atop the entity's head as a white-clothing being cracked his knuckles, exiting the palace...which now had a NEW giant broken-open hole in the wall.

"...well." Purple remarked. "Our day just keeps getting more and more interesting! Who might you be?"

A terrible, dark idea was flickering in Senior's mind as he gazed upon Red and Purple, thinking about all the times they'd made him ignore cries for help to the Massive from outposts and scared soldiers on enemy planets. He thought about the Vortians and Screwheads and Meekrob and other aliens who had suffered under Irken hands. He thought about her. His boss. His FIRST boss.

She never, EVER would have done anything like they'd done. She had been strict at times...but she'd done what she'd believed was right, and had always felt bothered when innocents had been hurt by her policies.

Why. Why were Red and Purple still breathing when so much worthier rulers were dead? If THEY were dead then-

"Don't." Sude insisted immediately, a hot, flaring anger rising in Senior. "I KNOW how tempting it is, but you NEED to resist."

A red mist was falling over Senior's mind. Resist? Let them GO?

Let them LIVE?

"Why should they live when so many are dead..." He thought. "All because of their GREED...their
freaking GREED...

He stepped forward, fists clenched, eyes blazing as he raised a hand up to blow them to Kingdom Come...

He then felt Sude's hand on his arm. Gentle...soft. It was like it was made of feathers.

"Nick."

The Tallests gazed from the dragon to Senior as he grit his teeth tightly, then lowered his raised claws, holding his head in one hand.

"...I'm tired." He said. "...I'm so...so...tired of this. And of everything you've done. You'd better stop it. Because this is where it leads you." He told the Tallest, gesturing around at the broken-open palace, at the remnants of the tree they'd almost been hanged at, the giant shears discarded on the ground. "To places like THIS. And at the mercy of people like me. And not everyone's even like me."

"You ARE a lot like them." Sude admitted. "You too have near-uncontrollable desires for so many things. You rule over others, albeit a smaller group. You have potential...and power...and great ambition. So much like them."

Red frowned. "Hey, wait. So...this fancy power you have could have just as easily gone to US? Hand it over!"

"No." Sude said firmly, putting a hand on Senior's shoulder. "NO, my Tallests. It won't be given to you. I let him wield this power...and I'll let him stay close to you so you can see what he'll become."

"WHY?" Purple asked.

Sude grinned.

"To MOCK you."
He remembers the first time he approached him. He'd asked him, the dumb but nice kid, to help him with "something important". "Fate of the world" stuff.

And Nick had said "yes". Why not? He was the nice white kid from Texas.

"C'moooon!" Dib had yelled, Gaz sitting on the couch, looking at something she had in her hand. It was "Show and Tell" day at the school, they were a long ways away from the first halcyon days of high school. This meant just a BIT more time for...for simpler things. Simpler days, simpler goals, simpler joys, like-

"An airplane? Really?" Dib asked.

"It reminds me that as soon as I save up some money, I'm gonna buy a ticket and put so much distance between those chumps and me, it'll boggle their tiny minds." Gaz said dryly. "What're YOU bringing in?"

"Watch. NICK, C'MON! If you can't suit up at home base, I'd worry about how you'd handle it in the field!" Dib yelled out, holding his hands to his mouth.

THWOMP! Nick leapt down from behind the sofa, landing squarely on the table as Gaz blinked, Dib smirking slightly. "HA-HA! Reckon I gotcha good!"

"Would have!...if I hadn't seen you crawling behind there two minutes ago." Dib said with a small smile.

"...naaah! I gotcha." Nick laughed, showing off his outfit. He was dressed in a stylish black jacket with black pants to match and a set of black sunglasses. He saluted Dib proudly as Dib grinned.

"He's like some beautiful brainless zombie. He'll do anything I say. I think everybody on Earth would be so much happier if they had their own zombie slave."

Gaz raised an eyebrow. "He'll seriously do ANYTHING you say? Okay. That puts you up a notch in my book."

"Thanks!"

"Which puts you at notch ONE."

"C'mon, Dib, we got us some ale-ee-uns to catch, don't we?" Nick said in his charming drawl, leaping through the air and landing by the doorway, striking a proud-looking pose. "I've got the grenades tucked in my jacket, two dozen sticks of dynamite and enough plastique to blow Hoover Dam apart. Ol' Zim won't know what hit 'em!"

"I told Dad it was for a "school project" purposes." Dib told Gaz as she chuckled darkly, eager to later swing by Zim's house to watch the fireworks. "Real science: the explosive effects of explosives on various buildings like, say, the house down the street...his garage...his LAB..."

"The Hot Topic?"
"Do you promise me one life-sparing the next time I take the last soda?"

"Deal."

*Dib looked at his new zombie/partner/slave, as Nick cheerily, albeit somewhat vacantly, smiled back, the same thought going through all three of their heads.

"This is the best day of my life..."

Mr. Thildari adjusted the perception filter he kept hidden in the necklace he wore, looking himself over in the mirror. Not too shabby, he thought to himself. He thought it was good the way he'd chosen an appearance of a darker-skinned human. The kids in these cities were far too used to seeing white faces. As he'd travelled through the Earth, seeing it's people, observing their habits, pigging out on any fried food they might have had, he played a bit of a game.

It was called "Count how long it takes to see a black face". In some places, the clock never stopped. Where had Los Angeles been hiding it's one million plus African American citizens? He felt their pain. He understood it, he sympathized with humanity. They were stupid, they were brash, they were arrogant and above all...gifted.

He saw the potential and power within. And he, who had gained sympathy for the suffering after years of seeing poor souls die, feeling their final thoughts and emotions seep into him, had understood the importance of things that Irken kind had disregarded. Emotions, TRUE emotions, not the facsimiles that most felt. Emotions like kindness, and passion and sadness...and love...

At the thought of "love", he instantly thought of HER. And his hand wavered. He remembered how he'd felt as he held her hand and helped her up from her seat or from her bed or from the ground when she'd fallen. He remembered the joy he'd felt just being with her, SPEAKING with her...laughing with her.

There could be things like birthday parties, couldn't there? Things like music? Couldn't there be music and nice books to read alone? There could be room for that.

...there could be room for love, the way Earthlings eagerly made room. That's why he, the oldest of the Consulars, had decided to begin sowing the seeds within the Irken people as he and his Consulars grew strong, and eventually his disciples became the first Control Brains.

Now millions upon billions of Irkens had a secret (and sometimes, not secret at all) love for Earthen culture. They wore hats and scarves and headbands and cowboy boots. They ate fries and big macs. And BOY, did they SURE did love to rap all of a sudden! And soon EVERY Irken would be like that...

Soon every Irken...would become "human". They needed to be. Because what they were now...was a disgrace. Like Red and Purple.

He chuckled dryly. "What would they think if they knew?" Darithil, Cardinal of the Consulars mused.

"THAT LONG?!" Red yelled angrily at Feyr as he sat atop Jormungandr, who looked very, very amused. "ALL the Control Brains are in on this, then?"
"Oh, quite." Feyr remarked as Maht the Service Drone presented Purple with a plate of nachos and some soda, but Purple pushed it away, shaking his head back and forth with slow and sad finality.

"I don't think even SUGAR'S going to make me feel better." Purple whispered.

Maht gasped in horror. What crazy, insane world had he entered?!?

"You're aware of the term "moral relativist"? Our ways might be forgiven from a perspective like that if we only applied them to ourselves. But we try to force our lifestyle on others. That's not acceptable." Feyr told the Tallest. "But Earthlings, ohhhh...they are a CRAFTY race." A smile broke over his face. "They use WORDS, and they INFLUENCE and BRIBE and MANIPULATE and INSPIRE. Their greatest gains come from a courtroom or a podium, not at the barrel of a gun. And so we took a page out of their playbook, HAVE been for years. Even YOU two have something inside you that's very, VERY Earth-esque. Something unheard of to Irkens."

"And that would be...?" Red trailed off, an invisible eyebrow raised as he growled, Purple sobbing as he tried to eat some nachos loaded with extra cheese and salsa.

Jourmungdr GIGGLED, Senior's many charges and the assorted guards and assistants of the palace chuckling and guffawing. They knew. But they weren't going to say it, lest they be struck by lightning.

"Oh, you got something on your..." Red remarked, noticing Purple's messy face. Purple tried to wipe it off, but missed a chunk of salsa, so Red tenderly reached up, brushing it away.

"Is it off?" Purple mumbled.

"Yeah, now you're...now you're perfect." Red said with a small smile.

_A summer plaaaaace..._ White sang under his breath, humming the rest of the song as Red and Purple stared into each other's eyes.

"W-well, anyway!" Red whipped back to Feyr, growling. "You're going to immediately-"

"FORGEEEEET." Feyr whispered, his eyes glowing brightly as Red and Purple and the others, save for our dear protagonists, held their heads, mumbling quietly. "You will forget...you will forget...you will forget..."

"...can you make them stop making me do "The Electric Chair"?" Senior requested.

"NICK!" Sude yelled. "This is-!"

"You will stop forcing Senior to do the "Electric Chaaaair"...for you are JANITORIAL DRONES...and you work for _minimum wage...minimum wage...minimum wage..._" Feyr crooned out

"We are janitors..." Purple mumbled. "We work for minimum wage...PLUS BENEFITS."

"Done."

SNAP! Feyr snapped his claws and Red, Purple and their many guards and assistants all calmly
saluted Feyr. "Off to scrub the latrines, SIR!" The two Tallest said, happily walking off as Sude frowned darkly.

"What do you believe you are doing?!!" He growled at Feyr.

"It's time to initiate Phase 2. Phase 1 was integrating Earth culture into Irken society. Making it seep secretly into the minds of their people." Jourmungdr said calmly. "Phase two...is making it DOMINANT. WE'RE TAKING OVER!" He laughed, punching the air. "Bring out the the Triple S!" He roared out, whipping his head in the direction of his primary control room.

"The Triple whuh?" Senior remarked, his eyes bugging out with many of the others as THEY marched forth, all clad in white and pink, shimmying down the hall...and all positively booty-licious.

"My GOD...how come they don't go toppling forward with all that weight??!" Peech gasped out in obvious surprise.

"...I'm gonna be sick." Dite whispered, holding her hands over her mouth.

"The m-m-mounds...the moooooooounds..." Xeil whispered.

"Senior, we need to stop this." Sude whispered to Senior. "This isn't meant to happen, Red and Purple need to remain Tallest, Jourmungdr-"

"Frankly, I like THIS guy ten times more than I ever liked Red and Purple. Jourmungdr never tricked me into walking into an open garbage chute!" Senior snapped back. "And he never made me do "The Truffle Shuffle" either! He and the Consulars can HAVE Irken culture, I think we'll be better off under him."

"But-"

"I'M your host, and this time, YOU'RE listening to ME!" Senior yelled back. "If things get out of control, I'm stepping in, but I'm tired of trying to pretend Red and Purple weren't horror shows! I'm tired of their "might makes right" ways! They can go F—K themselves! So screw those guys..." He pointed out the door. "I'M GOIN' HOME."

...  ...  ...

...a change had come quickly over the city of Irk as the week went on. A new feeling was rising on the streets.

And that feeling could be summed up in a single word.

PAAAAAARTY!

At first, there was confusion. Then fear.

And then, a slow, dawning realization. Horror turning to amazement. What had once been forbidden,
frowned upon, deemed defective...

**WAS NOW FAIR GAME.**

"My clothes don't match, my clothes don't match, I'm out in public and my clothes don't match!" A tall, lanky Irken laughed, waving his booty in the air as he shook his hands back and forth atop a donut shop.

"**We're here! We're queer! Get used to it! We're here! We're queer! Get used to it!**" A large parade of Irkens roared out, waving banners and signs in the air as several of them banged on giant drums, others playing saxophones. Dite was strolled on the roofs nearby, leading a small squadron of Red Helms as Chulainn floated overhead, chuckling slightly.

"Cuuuite."

"It is."

"...get the tear gas."

"MWA-HA-HA!" A brown-eyed, big-breasted Irken roared proudly as she waved her gloved fists in the air, standing before a large crowd at the gas station. "No longer am I Invader Dowd! No, now I have ascended due to the gift of Jourmungdr, as delivered by Sue, Saint of Relationships!"

Another Irken with pink eyes cheerily waved as she pulled another Irken into an alley, the guy cheering as she raised her shirt. "I have returned to the flesh!" The former Invader cackled. "I am...**MIGHTY ENDOWED!**"

"...well, she's certainly got huge...tracts of land." Senior mused as he and Maht escorted the prisoners into town to basically let them free. Nobody really gave a s—t where they parked anymore, or who was out and having fun. A MEEKROB could have flown down the street with a lampshade on its head and nobody would have cared.

"WOO! WOOHOO-HOOOOO!" White crowed out, licking his lips, rubbing his gloved hands together. "Look at THAT!"

"I see you, cowering in fear!" Mighty Endowed roared.

"This ain't FEAR, it's ANTICIPATION!" White laughed.

"I will defeat you all! I will..." Mighty Endowed wobbled around, arms waving wildly. "Oh no! Too top-heavy, I can't...can't..."

**THWOMP.**

"...well." White mumbled, shaking his head as Senior and May began laughing so hard their knees buckled, Maht sighing as he went to go help the poor woman up before people began taking photographs of her. Sude hovered invisibly behind him, hidden from the others, disapprovingly growling under his breath as his host continued to ignore him, listening to May talk about her sons.

"That is **SO cute.**" Senior admitted. "You're so forgiving. I mean, crashing the spaceship into the roof, not a problem. Busting the faucet, not a problem."
"Yeah, but putting frogs in my brassieres, THEN we talk about getting my belt out!" May laughed, smacking her fist into her palm as Senior laughed along with her, heading into the very same bar he'd taken Maht into at the very beginning of all of this, many a patron glued to the television as a metallic-headed, cycloptic newscaster was in an interview with, of all people, the pink-eyed "Saint Sue", who had matted lipstick on her lips and a drunken-looking, half-naked man in an alley nearby as several dozen Irkens similar to her waved at the cameraman.

"So what do you say to the threats?"

"I've read Wednesday's commentary paper on her. "Yesterday at 3:PM, Irk shook and gave birth to a goddess called "The Elite". It couldn't have been more slanted if you built it on a 90 degree angle. But that's fine. I'm not scared of Wiyn." The Irken insisted, moving an arm down her chest.

"You're not intimidated by her promises? Since Tallest Feyr took control just last week, the army has, for the most part, sided with "The Elite" and seem out for blood. YOUR blood."

"We're fine with that. We've got a special...performance...ready." Sue said, tracing a claw around one nipple.

"What can we say?" Another Irken girl giggled, as one held her hand up to another's mouth and that Irken began to seductively suck. "We've got a thing for men in uniform..."

The news reporter gaped at this, blinking stupidly as a piece of paper was quickly passed to him from somebody off-screen. He glanced it over, gaping in surprise. "This just in: Massive desertions from Irk's Armed Forces..."

By now, Senior and May were rolling on the floor with laughter, as the green-eyed communications officer turned to May, an idea coming to him. "Let's go find someplace good and quiet. I know a nice place to relax."

It wasn't long before he and she were back at the palace that the Tallest had called their private home away from home, which they were now cleaning with mops. "Don't be fooled by the rocks that I got, I'm still, I'm still Jenny from the Block..." Purple sang out, shaking his booty around as Red hummed along, Senior ordering Maht to go pick up May's children from, of all places, the prison wing on Vort. Per "The Tallest's Extra Special Friend's" orders. He wanted them back in May's arms by tomorrow morning.

But tonight? Tonight he was showing off the most majestic and prettiest part of all Irk...The Hall of History.

Banners lined the golden walls, all proudly displaying the Tallest's in their finer moments of ruling, before large platinum statues that glittered under the enormous crystalline chandelier light fixtures above their heads. A red carpet lined their way through the Hall of History as Nick gestured at one Tallest after another.

"Tallest Grapa. Poor guy. VERY unlucky. History can't remember a single day he didn't stub his toe or get his claw stuck in a door. One time he was accidentally locked outside of his own shuttle and clung to it like a dung beetle for two and a half HOURS before they realized he was outside."

"HOURS?"
"He held his breath."

"That one, who's that? He's got creepy eyes." May asked, pointing at a yellow-armored Tallest with deeply-sunken eyes and simplistic antennae. His statue was, well...it was as if, had it been him, in a photograph, it would have looked like he was leaning in verrrry close to make sure the photographer noticed him above all the others.

"Spork." Senior told her, chuckling. "He was always starved for attention. He's the one who started the tradition of making me do the "Electric Chair" if he was in a bad mood!" Senior tapped a single clawed digit against his head. "He was positively INSANE, lemme tell you. One time I actually saw him kick a smeet!"

"The FIEND." She whispered, noticing another nearby statue, a female Irken with deep, entrancing blue eyes. "I know her, my brother talks about her all the time! That's Miyuki, right?"

"Yes, Lady Miyuki." Senior said blissfully. "Nicest boss I ever had." He rested head on his hand, sighing wistfully, antennae drooping down as his mind thought back to happier times, his voice becoming longing. "She never made me do "The Electric Chair". She let us have free soda. She never threw anything at my head when she was pissed, she...she was...I..."

He trailed off, sighing. "...she was nice, and REAL. She was considerate, a considerate leader. That's what I wanted. That's all ANYBODY wants. Somebody to say "you matter", you know? To make you feel like you're the most important person in the universe, if only for a little while..."

"Yeah, I know what you mean." She sighed slightly as she and he went on walking down the hall. "I'd give away a hundred years of my life if I could find somebody to make me feel that way. I thought I'd found it with my old husband, but he..." She chewed her lip, face darkening. "...I just...grrrr..."

"I'm sorry. I'll do what I can to get you to your children and find you a nice place to live. Heck, you could even live here with me, if...if you'd like." Senior offered gently, patting her on the shoulder.

"I'd really like that!" May said cheerily. "You seem like a really nice guy. I feel safe around you-"

Sude now manifested and tugged Senior to the side. "This needs to STOP."

"Why? What could be better than love? More higher than love?"

"LIFE." Sude snapped. "And the preservation of it! Love is only a small part, but right now Irk is being DROWNED in crushes and affections and lusts and Rage is duking it out with Love on the streets as that horrid beast Wiyn strikes out at everything around her! If you want to fix this, you need to bring me to Earth, the base Earth, the Black Lantern is rising..."

Nick glanced out the window, noticing something. His eyes went wide as saucers.

"And if he's not stopped from claiming his true ho-"

"Oh, the base Earth? Well, then..." Nick said quickly, dragging Sude to the window and gesturing outside. "Feel free to point it out to me!"

You see, true believers, over the week, something had occurred. Time and space had been ripping apart across Irk, and now...it was ripping across all the universe.
For now...

There were hundreds of Earths hanging over the starry skies of Irk.

"Oh Me-Dammit." Sude mumbled.

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... "I don't feel good." Bo Nar told the purple-eyed Irken as the Irken put a a gloved hand on his forehead within the little cell that had been their "home" for the past three months. Maht frowned, looking down at the child, then at young Ian, who coughed slightly as he curled up in the tiny blanket they'd been allowed. Such filthy conditions the poor things were forced to live in. It was sick. Still, he felt...uncomfortable...around young "skaatel".

Truth be told, he understood on an intellectual level that the racism Irkens felt was just plain inane and degrading to their own race. He had a hard time shoving down his innate Irken racism, but he WANTED there to be some way he could tell this little one "I'm sorry, I want to help you". He WANTED there to be some way to get rid of his innate hatred of other races, that irrational stupidity.

He'd had an easier time before, back when he'd joined up as an elite guard and had been assigned to guard other aliens, scientists working for the Empire. People believe what they saw with their eyes, and he saw other aliens being of INCREDIBLE use, being INCREDIBLY skilled, and he KNEW, through and through, that the idea of any Vortian or Screw Head of Meekrobian or Arcadian being "inferior" was a foolish idea. But then he'd been re-encoded for...

...it was much harder now to ignore that nasty little voice inside him. Much harder. And now it was speaking through his mouth as he went to the hospital wing down the hall, taking out a temperature taker, mumbling angrily. "I should be relaxing with the rest of my people! Look at the streets! The Irkens, they've gone wild!...Volume Four."

He sighed. "That filthy little Vortian goat better be really sick-"

A wet, squelchy BUUULLAAAUUUGGHHHKKK echoed through the prison wing, several prisoners nearby shrieking in disgust as Maht's eyes widened, turning pale. "I DIDN'T MEAN IT!!!" He screamed at the Heavens, rushing back into the cell as he kneeled by the coughing Vortian, a puddle of...stuff...nearby.

"Oh no, oh no, oh no..." He thought to himself, Ian clutching his brother by the shoulder as Maht chewed his lip. How was he going to help the poor child? He had to do SOMETHING, but he wasn't Jayd, he had no medical knowledge, he bussed tables for Irk's sake-

Mariaht...

A voice?

Mariaht...
Maht turned his head, a faint violet glow illuminating the room as a being drifted through the air, landing in his kneeling lap as it gently nuzzled him.

Mariaht of the Planet Irk. You entered the Irken Military, training as an Elite because of a desire to protect those within your planet, became a guard to protect the best and brightest. I say to you now...don't shy away from your natural compassion for others...

Maht reached out, stroking it's furry head. "...who...are you?" He asked.

"I am Fiyvr. Do you want to help the little one?" It asked cheerily, furry little tail shaking eagerly as Bo coughed madly, Ian gulping in fear.

"Yes." Maht answered immediately.

"Take my paw."

And with that...he CHANGED.

... 

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Dib sat down in the Massive's enormous flight deck, reclining in one of the Tallest's personal seats as he closed his eyes and allowed himself to simply...imagine. He was now sitting, miles above his home city, in the ship that his arch-rival's leaders flew in. It was like having the Joker sit in the Batcave, reclining on Jason Todd's old outfit.

Gaz, naturally, had decided to come on as well, simply because she wanted to try out a few of the interesting devices on the ship. Luckily, she had assistance with figuring out what was what. The stylishly-dressed Ms. Knightly had delivered not only a DNA sample from the Tallests to let Dib inside, she'd brought a manual on all the finer points of flying the ship. Including using-

"The Bovine Defacementizing Cannon." Knightly explained as she gestured at a vaguely turret-like cockpit area, Gaz rubbing her hands together as she sat in it's comfy chair controls, flexing her fingers over it before she tightly gripped the firing mechanism. "It automatically hones in on the nearest sources of Holsteins, just so you know."

"A Cow Graffiti Gun. Heh. They think of everything, these Irkens. Maybe they're not so bad after all." She laughed, firing off the Defacementizing Cannon as several Holsteins let out simultaneous "Mooooo-ing" cries of surprise, GIR, who'd been sitting near one and trying to get it to try "Farmer Brand" jerky...no, seriously, he'd shoved a farmer into a machine, blood everywhere-uh...AAAANYWAY, he'd been trying to get the cow before him, a fine specimen at that, to try some of the "deliciously ironic" jerky, only for a giant flash of light to blind him...

Revealing a peace sign had been "branded" onto the cow's side. He blinked in surprise, but took it in stride.

"So, what do you think about this "mad cow disease"?" He asked it, as it chewed it's cud.

"Moooooo."
"Yeah, I mean, what do I care? I'm a helicopter!" He laughed, holding his ring up as tiny propeller blades popped out of his head, making him rise up into the air, smiling at the sight of-

Dib, Gaz and the others were now made VERY aware of the fact that there were HUNDREDS of Earths in the night sky. Dib's first idea?

"ZIM DID THIS." He growled, intending to fly to Zim's house and launch a missile or something at it. But then something caught his eye. A flash of familiar black light as...

As NNY slunk into a house far below, through the back door.

That guy wasn't dead?! Something was clearly off. And this guy had tried to kill his sister. Freaky skin-peeling janitor first, Zim later. Zim was predictable, after all, Dib reasoned as he parked the Massive behind a large cloud mass, teleporting himself down to the house. He'd just wait for Zim to start yelling about how he was ZIM and-

Nick answered the door, a visible shiner on his face. Dib immediately took a step back in surprise.

"Wh-whuh? NICK? What the heck? What're you doing here?"

"I live here." Nick said simply, his hat off, revealing his...condition. Dib shuddered in disgust as he stepped inside, Nick happily letting his "ol buddy" in. "What can I do ya for, ol' pal?"

"Nny...lives here too?" Dib murmured, looking at the pile of mail on the kitchen counter, several of them addressed to "Johnny T. Cidalmaniac.

"Ever since my parents died, yeah, he's been my foster dad!"

"You never told me the janitor was your foster dad."

Nick shrugged. "Y'all never asked!"

Dib instantly realized something. He'd never asked about a lot of things. He couldn't name the last names of over half his classmates. He didn't know where any of them lived. He didn't know where NICK had lived or what his parent's names had been. He felt shame rise in him: ZIM probably knew more about his classmates than he did, and that was only because he kept a catalogued "List" in his computer that included Dib, Torque Smacky, several dozen kids, and somebody named "Black Mamba".

Dib was suddenly launched through the air as a series of black spikes pinned him to the wall, Nny chuckling darkly. "Come into my web, said the spider to the fly..."

...God had once said that the Meek would inherit the Earth...

But he never accounted for the Mighty.
"HA-HA-HAAAAA!" An orange-clad Irken cackled madly, "Agent Orange" firing off construct cannons from her wrists as a bird-like entity chuckled darkly, sitting on her shoulder with White and Knightly robbing a liquor store for some nice wine they planned to have with dinner. "C'MON, PIGS! I'LL MAKE YOU FAMOUS AS ELVIS!" She yelled at the Helm Hordes as she riddled their bodies with bullets, none of them able to hold a candle to her rapid-fire assault, the true Red Helm hanging back and angrily growling, Chulainn digging claws into an alley wall.

"It's "Pirsyst"! Damn lil' creep." The demonic entity snarled. "She's far too tightly bonded to that host for her to listen to me."

"You and her? REALLY?" Dite chuckled.

"...we used to date. So what?" Chulainn mumbled. "Don't you judge me. Where the hell's Jourmungdr?"

"Regrettably, he can't come." Jayd called out, leaping through the air as Tak wafted around him, landing by the Red Helm and Chulainn. "He's trying to track down Wiyn, all of the consulars are busy with work of their own. However, I'm more than happy to-LOOK OUT!" he yelled, tossing up a glowing green shield that deflected a sudden hail of bullets launched their way.

"Friggin'...you're a quick little squirt, ain'cha?" Agent laughed. "Bing-bang-boom! POPCOOOORN!" She howled out, spitting through the air, an orange haze rising from her body as projectiles soared high.

"Heads down, grenade!" Jayd, Green Lantern called out, everyone ducking and covering to avoid being blown to smithereens. "Sheesh, so many different "Lanterns", it's like a rainbow got spilled out over Irk!" He mumbled as Agent Orange cheerily nodded at White and Knightly, making her way into her own customized construct of a motorcycle and taking off down the street...

The Red Helm and the Green Lantern chased after her from the rooftop, the Helm narrating to herself...out loud.

"She's hurt my city. She won't get away with that. For she provides for me, my city does. She is my mother...she is my lover...she is-"

"Too bad she ain't no PSYCHIATRIST." A cold, high voice rang out.

A powerful fist, clawed and heavy, tore the roof they were on up and launched them through the air. Jayd surrounded he and Dite in green bubbles, but they were quickly broken apart as yellow needles shot out at them from a yellow-and-black-clothed Irken being with a helm covering the top area of it's head. It had a long black cape with a dark yellow trim, and black stripes jutting down from its lip to it's chin as it coldly sneered.

"The Talon, I assume?" Green Lantern Jayd mumbled, helping Dite up as Agent Orange stopped the motorcycle, smirking up at The Talon.

"Good to see you, ol' friend." Pirsyst remarked. "Wanna help us deal with these joiks?" She asked in her faint, vaguely Chicagoan accent. "The power generators is MINE-"

"He-HEM!" Her host snapped.
"...is OURS, you understand, but you're more than welcome to a piece of them."

"My pleasure." A cold and twisted snarl hissed out, as a spectral, phantom-esque thing rose from the Talon's body, tiny, shrunk en screaming heads drifting around it like cursed satellites. It's head revealed a large eye in the center, slit like a reptile's, with long, wicked claws instead of fingers, and a mouth at the top of a smooth forehead. "I am Fear...and you will bow to me." It hissed, yellow bands shooting out to pin Dite and Jayd to the ground, their respective deities gasping in pain as they were tugged down too.

"Times like this I wish I was Psyche...I could have hope this would all work out." Chulainn laughed dryly, Panyck tightening his grip on them as Agent Orange and Pirysyt took off down the road.

"It doesn't have to be this way, Nollij." Another voice said almost kindly as the Yellow light of Fear began to fade from them, an indigo glow bathing them in healing light. They all looked up to see a form descending on manifested steps, a purple outfit on it's Irken body. It wore a bead necklace and had tribal tattoos on it's arms and it's clothed pant legs, and above all, there was a serenity to Maht the Service Drone's face. He felt so...at ease. He could feel only compassion and sympathy for those before him.

"You? Are you SERIOUS?" Xeil chuckled, her voice slipping back to normal as she lost the fakey Michelle Pfeiffer "Catwoman" impression she'd been going for. "Oh, Maht. Maht, Maht, Maht. I'm going to nail your skin to a door, Maht."

She launched herself forward on skeletal yellow wings, throwing a clawed fist-

That Maht caught as he frowned, his expression darkening as his deity shimmered to existence on his shoulder.

"Bad move, Nollij." Fiyvr said calmly, shaking his furry head back and forth. "Very bad move."

"My name is PANYCK! Nollij no longer exists!" The avatar of Fear hissed. "You should SYMPATHIZE with my ultimate goal. Fear is what keeps people alive! It's what keeps them from doing the stupid!"

"It's true, some fear is necessary. But you of all people, you, the most knowledgeable of us, should have remembered that "compassion" means being able to see things fairly, objectively, from all sides...and THEN coming up with a solution. And your way isn't right." Fiyvr shook his head again. 

"...Maht? I want you to pretend that Xeil here is...say...the Tallest. Let's do some healthy anger channeling. But no lethal weaponry, please."

Maht's eyes glittered as he knocked Xeil through the air with a mighty THRUCHA-KRUCK, a large paintball gun appearing in shades of indigo and violet and purple as he aimed the cannon-esque launcher squarely at Xeil. "Get...your own...damn...drinks!"

BRA-BRAK!

A paintball pelted Xeil squarely in the head as she looked up at it, everyone else blinking, confused and surprised.

"MAKE...YOUR OWN...DAMN NACHOS!"

BRAKKA-BRAKKA-BRAKKA-BRAKKA!
Xeil was taking a beating as Maht went BALLISTIC with the semi-automatic paintball weaponry, screaming like a madman, years of repression finally being paid for as the levee broke. "STROKE YOUR OWN DAMN LEKKU! COUNT DOWN FROM FIFTY FIIIIVE!"

"Uh, Maht, you can STOP now..." Tak murmured, thinking even THIS was a bit too much as far as desires for revenge went, Maht dancing around Xeil as he kept shooting, Knightly watching from afar as her husband shook his head back and forth sadly, the red-head genuflecting.

"Poor dear." The Arosean said, Maht screeching even louder.

"FIFTY FIVE! FIFTY FOUR! FIFTY THREE! FIFTY TWO!!" 

... 

...meanwhile, Sude was trying to get Senior to listen to him as the angry communications officer stormed away from the palace with May, ignoring the draconic deity, invisible brow furrowed. "Please, you've got to get to the base Earth, it's IMPERATIVE-"

"I've spent YEARS being miserable, Sude. YEARS struggling just to keep going. Now I ask for just a little time to enjoy a life without being ordered around, without worrying about whether my next set of instructions to a military base will be to gas a planet, without worrying whether I'll be shot out an airlock...and you say "no"?!! He swung a hand at the sky. "Those Earths all look peachy keen to me! Unless one of them spontaneously bursts into flames, I'd like to go to the CIRCUS with my GIRLFRIEND!"

He blinked then, and blushed over at May. "That...that is if...I mean..."

She squeezed his hand in agreement and smiled as Senior glared back at Sude. "So leave me alone! I think I've EARNED a little happiness, wouldn't you-"

"The other you wouldn't have been this selfish." Sude muttered.

Senior stopped in place. "...what."

"I guess I shouldn't be so surprised. This is the you that's the most Irken. The most selfish and self-centered, more prone to whim, more stubborn and annoyingly persistent-"

"And evil and wrong-YOU HATE US, I get that!" Senior yelled at his host. "I've been with you long enough to realize you can barely STAND me, let alone my race. We're evil, alright? And flawed and cruel and SELFISH, that's who we are, so why don't you just let us self-destruct, do whatever the hell we want to ourselves if you hate us so much?!!" By now, the communications officer was almost screeching. Real hurt was leaking into his voice.

Now it was self-hate that was tinting his speech. Senior...hated himself. And what he was.

"We're bad, that's what we are! And if you hate us so much, why not just let us die?!"
"BECAUSE THAT'S NOT WHO I AM!" Sude yelled back at him. "AND IT ISN'T WHO YOU USED TO BE EITHER!"

And with THAT, Senior's eyes shot wide open. Suddenly familiar dreams now shot past his eyes. Dreams that were more than that...dreams of a different him, of...of a better him. And dreams of...

May blinked, speaking quietly as she looked upon Nick's face as he turned to gaze into her eyes. She'd never seen an Irken doing that before.

"...you're crying." She said softly.

Nick raised a gloved hand to his cheek as he felt the tear slip down onto it, his body quivering, eyes slowly growing wider and wider.

"...May...I remember..." He whispered, turning around, the tears beginning to flow freely.

"Why?" He begged. "I remember and I realize the truth now. You KNEW what I really was? And you didn't say anything? Why? And why does this keep happening? What did I ever do to deserve this?"

"...I'm so, so, sorry." Sude murmured as May blinked in confusion. "...I am so...so...sorry."

"What're you talking about?" May asked.

"...May...this is Nick. He is...rightfully...a human-turned-Irken." Sude spoke, gesturing at his host. "A human-turned-Irken who's spirit has, time and time again, been sent through the many realms in the I-Z dimension. He has righted wrongs. He has saved Irk and Earth more times than you've brushed your teeth. And he is the proud father of three, with a beautiful, beautiful wife..."

Nick took May's cheek, smiling mournfully as she suddenly knew, she KNEW the truth...

"...May Nar. To have and to hold. Till death do us part."
The doorbell to Zim's home rang as he frowned darkly, answering with a scowl on his face. "What?! Who dares bother the almighty ZIIIIM?!"

Nick was standing there, holding something up in his hands, a stupid grinning expression on his "Southern Hospitality-filled" face. Zim blinked slightly, titling his head to the side. "What, strange-voiced human?"

"Dib sent me. He says he's done given up and admits y'all better." He told the alien. "And since y'all number one, ya gets a prize."

"...really?" Zim asked, raising an invisible eyebrow up, the giddy kid inside him giggling wildly. "What kind of prize?"

"A SUR-PRIZE!" Nick laughed. "So "Open ya mouth and close yer eyes, and you will get a big surprise"!"

Zim, smiling proudly, did just that, Nick sticking a sugary thing inside his mouth and letting go as Zim swallowed the circular thing down, licking the taste of the thing off his lips. "Hmm." He murmured. Tasted like frosting...but also...wait...it felt...HEAVY.

Did he just swallow something...metallic? He poked his stomach as Nick walked off, frowning as he felt a heat begin to burn up within from-

FWOOOOM! He could SEE a tiny fire popping up in his stomach and gaped in horror, smoke billowing out of his mouth as he circled around and around. "GAAAAAH! FIRE! FIRE! FIIIRE!" He screamed, looking around the neighborhood. "HELP! HEEE."

Then he saw Dib, the human resting a rocket launcher up on his shoulder with one hand as he waved with the other, a cheery grin on his face as he readied the heat-guided missile.

"Oh dooky." Zim mumbled, pouting slightly before he raced inside the house.

"Wow. He sure can move when he wants to!" Dib remarked nonchalantly, flicking the safety off and firing off the rocket as it soared through the air, across the cul-de-sac and straight into Zim's home, a satisfying, air-splitting explosion blowing the top of the house completely off as Zim cried out in agony, tiny flames popping up all over the home.

"AAA! WHY MUST THIS BE?!?"

Dib chuckled to himself as he hopped down the ladder and headed over to Nick, who held up a cooler filled with drinks, a big grin on his face. "GREAT job, partner!" He told the southern boy, giving him a thumbs up as the two shared a six pack of "Strawberry Kewl-Aid", sitting on the wall by the sidewalk. "Zim didn't know what hit him!"

"Nah, I'm pretty sure he figured out it was a rocket, pardner." Nick admitted, scratching his head. Dib just laughed a bit at this. Days like this were always enjoyable. He was having so much FUN with his new partner!
But it wouldn't be long before things would turn bad. Fast. As the days became weeks, Zim would begin to try new methods...and one day, he made a realization. Together, the Dib-Stink and the Nick-Fool were a near-unbeatable force.

But the fool was the stupider and weaker of the two. If he could trick him...get him alone...

And that...is exactly what happened.

The poor kid.

He didn't know what hit him.

"Why didn't you tell me when we first met?"

Senior stood before Sude, with Mariah nervously smiling at Peech as she rubbed the last paintball juice off her. Feyr and Jayd stood near May as all of the respective entities calmly watched Sude nervously try to justify his silence.

"I...I wanted to." He murmured softly. "I truly did. But...but you weren't ready. I wanted to show you the Schism, the rip in space and time, have THAT reveal the full truth to you so that you could see all the good you do, that you've DONE-

"But I've been ripped away from my normal life!" Senior howled at Sude, grabbing the white-furred dragon and tearfully glaring into his face, the others nervously looking on at the scene. "I had a FAMILY! A family! And time and time again I get forced into saving a species that you yourself can barely stand, saving it from itself! You're the Entity of Life and yet even YOU can barely stomach being around the Irken race! Why should I care?!"

"Because that's not who you-" The dragon began to say, the green-clothed communications officer punching him across the face, launching him back slightly as the Irken screamed at him, eyes brimming with tears.

"I USED TO BE SOMEONE ELSE! I USED TO BE NORMAL!" I...I WANT to be normal...I want to be someone else..." He slowly sank to his knees, covering his face and weeping. "I just...don't I DESERVE it?...why can't I just live a normal life?"

May held her cheek to her hand as she chewed her lip, seeing his tears. She understood, she really did....she knelt by him, taking his shoulder-

Seeing his newborn's first steps, hearing it's first word...he smiles and lifts Nora Nar up, holding her tightly to him. "Nothing's gonna haaaaaarm you, not while I'm arouuuuund..." He sang out.

...taking the children to school, seeing them grow up, get strong...first day of school...first day of college...they grow up so fast...they grow up so fast...

...Gentle words whispered to his wife as moonlight cascades through the curtains. He'd chosen to be human tonight. She might have married him in Irken skin, but deep down was a spirit that was uniquely human. That was what she loved...that was what she always loved...

He touched her cheek, leaning in close...lips getting even closer...
Time passes...and now he's a proud grandparent, a child bouncing on his knee as he explains his
great youthful adventures. So many wonderful stories to tell. "And then I held my fist up and I said
"You are a bug. But me? I AM A MAN!"

So tired...he's so tired...

He reaches out to hold her hand one more time...one last time...

"Are they all safe?"

"...yes, Nick. Yes."

"...I'm glad...I'm so glad..."

Sude stood back, his eyes ceasing their glow as Senior and May looked at each other, eyes widening
as Senior spoke first, haltingly, sadly. "Did you see?"

"...you've had such adventures." Sude murmured, putting a large, gentle hand on the communication
officer's shoulder, eyes filled with naught but sympathy. "...but...but you could never have that. Too
many people need a hero. They NEED one of the cub scouts in Spandex, especially in a realm like I-
Z. There's...so few of you...and with the Darkening Skies coming closer, I needed your immediate
helping in going to the Base Earth to halt the Black Lant-"

"You didn't give me a CHOICE." Senior growled darkly at the dragon before he took off running,
May yelling after him, Sude gasping.

"Honey, WAIT!"

"Please, you need to-"

"YOU DIDN'T GIVE ME A CHOICE!" Senior screamed back, as he felt his tears stream freely
down his cheeks, wishing they could sink inside his mouth and drown him as he barreled across the
plains of Irk, losing himself amongst the alleyways of the city as night slowly fell.

The Wing watched from far away, Psyche fluttering by her host as she sighed.

"Only two weeks...all of Irk's divided into factions...no more innocents left...a civil war on our hands
and he chooses to run..." She sighed. "I can sympathize...but he needs to have faith in a brighter
future. He needs hope."

The beautifully-winged embodiment of Hope turned to her gentle host. "You can bring him that."

...

...

...

...Zim looked down at Cass, gently caressing her cheek as his maroon/ruby eyes glittered. He'd
gazed into the Schism, he had knowledge and memories of all possible Invader Zims, and right now
the strongest memories of all were rising from the Zim of Realm "B-S".
Was it because of the existence of this dimension's "invaders" around him? Miyu, Two, the Angel, they all had ties to Realm B-S...yes, it was possible...

The more he thought about it, the more confused he felt. Feeling so much open concern and love for anyone was...well, to put it gently, discomforting. But a part of him well and truly WANTED the soft warmth that he knew companionship and love brought. That part of him wanted it so, so much.

"Invaders need no one. Love is the slowest form of suicide. If I'd never loved-" A little him kept repeating to himself inside his head.

"Oh SHUT UP!" A louder, more raucous voice within yelled, silencing the other. "That's not true and you damn well know it! Stop being so obtuse and pick up that journal to your right!"

Zim turned his eyes away from Cass's face and saw the journal on a nearby bedstand. Letting her get her rest, he picked the journal up and carried it out to the balcony, letting the wind blow through his antennae as he turned the pages, examining the heartfelt words within.

"It's not that ol' "Twoey Boy" hasn't made life her uncomfortable. He's gone out of his way to make me feel at ease, but there's a sadness in me that won't go away. I miss his voice. I miss his laugh. I miss the way he held my hand and looked at me for forgiveness. I miss giving it to him, and the way we talked about how proud we were of our children. He can't see how beautiful they've become. I miss him...I miss him...I miss him..."

He felt tears spring to his eyes.

He couldn't ignore these feelings.

He COULDN'T. In this moment, he knew, he KNEW that that existence was far better than the one he had here. They could burn this world down. If it meant getting her back...if it meant being genuinely happy again, and having someone with him he could share so much with...that mattered more than anything else he'd ever done in all his life. He knew that now.

"I'll help you." He told his son as Two tightly embraced him, smiling as Miyu nodded eagerly. The Beautiful Angel though, sighed slightly, folding his arms. Admittedly, he wanted to help his mother, well and truly he did. But he wielded the Indigo light of Compassion in his Exemplar Ring. That meant he saw things from more than one side. That meant he couldn't, in good conscience, let a world die just so his mother could return to life.

But he did have another idea, and after careful research into the subject, he felt ready to propose it.

"Question: You're...serious." Miyu muttered, mouth slightly opening. "...HIM."

"Yes, him."

"That fat f—k?! Are you HIGH?!?" Two bellowed, raising his arms in the air, growling darkly. "He's a mooching IDIOT!"

"He's also an immensely powerful wish-granting demonic entity with reality-altering powers."

"Well, there's that." Cass chuckled from her bed, hacking slightly as she raised herself up to her knees in her bed, pulling the covers down slightly. "What does it take?"
The Beautiful Angel gestured with his hands, mumbling something as a large board manifested to his right, complete with chalk. He began to quickly sketch out the image of several planets lined up to Earth, with a claw-like hand emerging from some ground that had a flower on it far to the right of the planets.

"The demon believed, as did our friend Dilbert, that two particular planets had to be aligned. The truth is that the mere energy field generated by ANY planets aligning with Earth will suffice as long as I have the right spell." He then coughed slightly before hacking up a large pamphlet from his mouth, Zim blinking stupidly as he wiped vomit off of it. "Which I happen to have right here."

"You kept it in your STOMACH?!" Zim gaped. "What else do you keep in there?"

Miyu blushed slightly, rubbing the side of her cheek. "Answer is...a little of this...a...little of that...personal, um...objects...roleplaying...nothing illegal, I assure you."

"It's illegal in 23 states." Frequency laughed.

"24. Arkansas buckled." The Beautiful Angel added as he unfurled the pamphlet. "Unfortunately, to complete this supplementary spell, I need blood, blood from freshly killed humans..."

Zim's smile was the work of demons. "Like Zim cares."

... ... ...

...we take you to a happy little town in Springville, Pennsylvania. Gentle clouds roll in the sky above a quaint little park as its people relax and enjoy a nice Sunday afternoon. Sitting by himself, a perception filter keeping his true appearance hidden, the golden-eyed being calmly reached down and pulled out a metallic small-tube-shaped device as he pressed a button on the right.

Springville, Pennsylvania.

"CLICK!"

Charming and quaint.

"...I am...sorry..."

Population 3,293.

"AAAAAAAUUUUUUUU-"

And falling.

One by one the others approached, the Beautiful Angel looking up as Two bopped his head back and forth, cheerily singing as Miyu escorted her father and mother. "It's the end of the world as we know it...and I feel fiiiine..." He crowed out.

"Question: Azazel, remember when I instructed you to open the canister and release the virus, thus
killing everyone within this town? Well, I was only kidding. Do not do it. Alright?" Miyu inquired.

The Beautiful Angel's face was stony as he furrowed his brow.

"C'moooooon! It's a JOKE!" Zim laughed through his gas mask. "She's got her father's superior sense of humor! But do I HAVE to wear this?"

"Information: The virus was designed to affect beings who's bodies originated here in this dimension. Your spiritual self might have changed, but your physical self hasn't. So yes, you need to wear the mask." Miyu told Zim, waving a long claw in the air. "But I am surprised you can't find my joke amusing. Not even a chuckle?"

"Sorry. No." Azazel said coldly, momentarily growling as teeth became sharp fangs for a few seconds.

"Ah, do I detect the sting of that old "responsibility"? That moral fiber that runs so strongly through you?" Zim chuckled as he punted a granny through a tree, punching the air as she embedded halfway through it. GIR himself would have been impressed. Touchdoooown!

"...

"That'll dissipate in a little while. Much like the virus!" Zim cackled. "You know, you two have so VERY much in common!" He told the Beautiful Angel, putting a hand on the being's shoulder as he helped him up. "You're both cold-blooded killers and you both, well, take people's breath away." Zim added with a dark grin as he kicked a dead Chihuahua's head to the side. "Azzy" just glared at this disgusting display as he knelt by a nearby child, taking a small knife and cutting into its arm. One by one, he went to them all, cutting the knife into them and getting their blood to soak the knife. Soon the entire town had had him carve his blade into them. The tiny knife now black as can be, he cleared his throat, holding one hand high as he began to speak tongue-twisting words. Lightning split the darkening sky as the clouds circled over their heads, The Beautiful Angel's eyes glittered brightly. The whole town shook like two giant hands were using it as a snowglobe as he spread his dark wings wide, ending the chant...

"I INVOKE THEE..."

A crack like a thousand piles of gunpowder exploding all at once, a sulfurous smell rising as greenish glow brimmed to life before their eyes...

"MORTOS DER SOULSTEALER!"

He rose up, stretching broadly, this ugly-looking demon. He had thick, fairly stubby claws instead of fingers, and dim eyes with a scraggly five o'clock shadow of a beard on his face, and two long locks of hair flowing down the sides of his head, jet black and slimy. He had faintly grayish skin with a patchy outfit, and above all, an odd smell. A VERY odd smell.

"Have you been drinking pickles?!" Zim found himself asking.

"Er, yes?" Mortos said meekly. "Why?"

GIR, sitting on top of a nearby tree branch, offered a jar of pickles, minus the pickles and leaving only juice behind, to a crow that had frozen into rigor mortis on the spot. Seeing it didn't want any,
he shrugged and kept drinking, coughing slightly before he began slurping again, his squeaky friend Minimoose, the purple, antlered moose toy with nubs of doom holding up a pet cat he'd stuffed with several dead chipmunks.

Okay, I know the virus made everything in the town drop dead and it's not the same as if they were alive BEFORE the robots did this, but dear LORD, Zim's companions are FREAKS!

... ... ...

...Dib struggled uselessly in the chair he'd been strapped to as Nny calmly brushed his hair back, putting his hands together as he darkly chuckled. Looking to his right, he saw Gretchen had been tied to a chair as well, and she had several harsh bruise marks on her face...evidently the janitor had been keeping her there for some time.

Shooing a confused-looking Nick out of the basement and insisting it was "just grown-up things" to the gullible fool, Nny the janitor put a cigarette to his lip, using his Exemplar Ring to make a tiny black flame. He puffed out dark grey smoke before speaking in a soft tone. Soft, but with an edge.

"Welcome to my laboooooratory." He laughed. "I've been waiting for another idiot to try and get close enough to my house. There's a REASON I keep a "Keep Out" sign up in my yard...it attracts the really, really stupid people."

Gretchen bowed her head. "I was only sellin' girl scout cookies." She mumbled.

"I thought, like the retard I've got currently living in my attic, that you had LEARNED TO SHUT UP WHEN I TALK!" Nny snapped at her, making her whimper as Dib glared balefully at this creep. Nny clapped his hands as a light turned on to his side, illuminating a giant whiteboard with marker sketches all over. The entire thing appeared to be a graphic description of the worst parts of the Bible. On crack.

And in the center...

"Your flesh is now my fantasy. I am going to surgically attach your bodies in a way never before attempted on a human subject. I shall create the world's first...HUMAN BUTTERFLY!" He cackled loudly, claw-like fingers curling as he laughed and laughed, Dib and Gretchen gulping in fear as they noticed the sown-together sketch in the center of the whiteboard, two people stitched together by their right and left side respectively-

"Wait." Dib frowned slightly. "Butterflies have WINGS. You'd just be making some freaky kind of human bug."

"That's what the retard said when I talked to him about my plan. See, I've got THIS!" Nny said cheerily, pulling out long strands of colored silk from his sleeve, one handkerchief at a time, over and over. "I'll stitch them to your arms and legs and give you wings! Huuuuuuh? HUUUUUh?" He asked, one eyebrow raised as "Nny the Magnificent" kept removing the handkerchiefs from his right sleeve.

"At least we'll be together." Gretchen offered Dib as he glowered at Nny.
BAKKA-BRUNK! A cookie tray slammed into Nny's head as he gurgled out, head rolling up into his head before he hit the ground. Nick dusted his hands off and smiled at the two.

"Good thing you're here!" Gretchen admitted, nodding eagerly as Nick helped her up and she ran over to Dib to free him, Dib catching a glimpse of the Exemplar Ring on her finger...a PINK ring. His eyes widened in surprise.

"Yeah, I'm...uh..." Dib cleared his throat. "Surprised he didn't hear you coming back downstairs."

"Yeah, guess he's just a "retard living in a BASEMENT", huh?" Nick said darkly, making Dib gape slightly at this. Could it be that despite everything Zim had done to the country bumpkin, some small, intelligent part of him remained?

But the day's terror was soon replaced by nervousness. His father had been called upon by the leaders of the world to explain just why the hell there were HUNDREDS OF EARTHS FLOATING IN THE SKY. And his dad had guessed Dib knew something about it.

Needless to say, once Dib and Gaz had finished their tale, Prof. Membrane had decided to hold a press conference to address the issue squarely. Gesturing proudly at his children, he spoke to the dozens of cameras before him as the eyes of the world watched him stand at a podium in front of his touching little home.

"As we all know, I've been the greatest mind this world has to offer, and I've dedicated it to the world's defense and BETTERMENT!" Professor Matthew T. Membrane announced to the cameras as Zim and the others watched from a now-empty diner in Springville.

Well, all of them save for Azazel, who had been so disgusted with Dib using stone-stiff people to put on a play of "Shakespeare in the Park" that he'd left. I'll say it again. FREEEEEEAAAAAKS!

"And to this end, I've created a team designed to ensure that this world's defense remains vigilant. A group that shall be headed by myself and a crack team of special operatives. I call it...THE GUARDIANS!"

He clapped his hands as men suddenly popped out of the ground, from within bushes, from high up in the clouds, all landing with a concussive THUD on the ground as they stood by their boss. All wore blue helmets that made their heads look HUGE, with red and white uniforms and high-powered weaponry strapped to their back, all faces cold and emotionless as Prof. Membrane pointed high into the sky.

"Read my lips, Earth. The alien menace that has brought about this strange phenomena will soon be ERADICATED. Soon it'll be safe to walk the streets again!"

"I got a baaaad feeling about this." Dib murmured.

Mortos scratched his head as he turned to the others. He'd not chosen to sit with them, he was sipping a Shirley Temple he'd made for himself at the bar. "So what do you want from me?" He inquired.

"It would appear as though THIS Mortos is much, much younger than the one the legends speak of. He has come from a different point in time and space than the one Dib summoned." Miyu decided.
"What do you expect from a "supplementary" spell? Guess you can't beat the classics. Still, if he's got the reality-altering powers we need..." Two rubbed his hands together, grinning darkly. "We want you to destroy the town of Philadelphia! With your magic combined with our friend Azzy's spells, that'll bring back enough of our world to bring our mother back to life."

"Woah, hold on! I couldn't destroy ANYONE!" Mortos insisted, waving his hands in the air. "Why don't I just go back to my private dimension?"

"What?! You do not want to FIGHT?" Zim asked, growling as his orange Exemplar Ring glittered with dark light.

"No, I'm not a VIOLENT demon! I'm a "hanyouu", I'm half human! I only got roped into this deal because I was arrested for petty theft by the hordes of hell after I died! I jacked Satan's toilet paper."

"PETTY THEFT?!" Miyu exclaimed., Two snorting loudly.

Zim, however, didn't find this amusing. He clenched his fist, his orange ring bathing him in light as he transformed. Now he was clad in a dark jacket with an orange shirt and set of gauntlets on his hand, a belt with a buckle t match as he darkly growled. "This...is what happens to fools...who don't fight for ZIM!" Zim proclaimed, clenching his fist tightly as he pointed the ring squarely at Mortos, forming constructs around him. The demon was now surrounded by sharp and stabby objects of torture, all inches away from tearing into his flesh. The power of Avarice could be wielded by the desire for things, and right now, Zim's desire was to force Mortos to work for him.

Miyu clapped her hands as her dad turned to look at her, a small smile spreading across her face. "Relax. There is little sense in wasting a perfectly good demon. I can make him fight...with THIS."

She pulled out something from her black outfit, a small spider-like red mechanism. Keeping Mortos in place whilst allowing his daughter room, Zim watched Miyu place the spider on Mortos's head as he howled in pain, a calm Mona Lisa smile on the techno-organic being's features. "Trust me, my friend, you WILL fight for us. You can do this the easy way, or the HARD WAY." She informed him coldly, snapping her fingers as jolts of red lightning split across his skull, making him howl in pain...

And suddenly, he VANISHED in a blaze of black as Miyu and the others were left standing there in surprise.

"...what?" Zim finally managed to get out. "...WHAAAAAAAT?!!?"

THE NEXT WEEK...

People were running in terror from the ugly being, screaming and howling in fear and terror, Mortos walking through Philadelphia, unsure of why everyone was so scared of him. He'd been wandering around Pennsylvania, and EVERYONE kept running away from him, no matter how hard he tried to get them to just listen to him.

"Wait, please!" He yelled out, wildly waving his hands in the air back and forth as the people ran for their lives, noticing a near-petrified, absolutely frightened Gretchen some distance away. He carefully approached her, one comforting hand patting her shoulder. "Please don't cry, little girl, I'm not gonna hurt you-"
"GET AWAY FROM HER!" Gretchen's mother yelled. First that creepy janitor the cops were still looking for, now this alien freak? She plucked her daughter up, carrying her off, Gretchen apologetically looking back at Mortos as he held a hand up.

"Wait! I wouldn't hurt her! I wouldn't hurt ANYBODY!" He called out, moving past a guy in a trench coat that was sitting in a wheelchair as Nick ferried him out of the hospital.

"You're lucky I got you there in time, huh, "Mr. Ninny"?" Nick asked Nny cheerily. Cheerily, but with an edge. "Also lucky that the porn moustache fooled everyone."

"...I HATE how much I look like Ron Jeremy." Nny mumbled, folding his arms, a cast over his foot that he'd broken when he'd fallen and twisted it, and a large roll of bandages over his head. A moment later though their attention was diverted when a car swerved to avoid hitting Mortos, flipping over a curb and racing across the ground, upside-down, headed right towards them!

"OH NO!" Mortos gasped in horror as Nny and Nick gaped at the oncoming car. He looked away, covering his eyes, hearing a crash...

Slowly he peeked through his claws...

Nny was now holding Nick in his arms, frowning slightly as he stood to the side of the crashed car, Nick clinging to the janitor for dear life as the inhabitant of the car pulled out his cell phone.

"Uh...get me the Guardians?"

...

...

...

... Senior sat within the empty palace that had once belonged to Red and Purple, statues of once-magnificent, and some malevolent leaders lining the halls around him. He had his head buried deep in his arms, having stripped himself of his clothes, wanting to feel his flesh against his flesh, wanting to feel more human...and being unable to feel even that.

There wasn't a sprinkler system in here should a fire break out, instead a chemical compound used to extinguish fires, a compound similar to what Earth fire extinguishers used, was what the palace had. He wished that the compound in the walls above could extinguish his life as easily as a fire, dissolve away his skin like it dissolved the embers in a flame. Senior yearned to melt away into the cold, grey stone of his silent companions...

He had a void now in the place where he'd kept his life...his dreams...

A week ago he'd learned the terrible truth. He was a human-turned-Irken, forever being tasked with going from world to world, across space and time in the I-Z realm, always righting wrongs, putting Irk on the right path, saving lives and halting evil in its tracks...

For what apparently had been centuries, he'd been saving lives...and yet...he'd never been able to enjoy a life of his own.

He wouldn't ever get to stay with his friends...with his family...
Always being shunted from one reality to another...never even realizing it, always ignorant of the truth...

It just wasn't fair.

His recent life had been MOCKING him, he thought angrily, clenching claws into his knees, antennae quivering in fury. Charged with instructing new souls to the Massive, helping them find their place, feeling like he was raising a little family all over again, or being the "fun uncle" to a bunch of cute nephews and nieces...then finding Sude...

He'd been so sure of what he'd been doing. The idea of using his new God's powers to help make Irk a better place. To help all of Irk understand the lessons that Life had to offer...and he'd even begun to fall in love with a beautiful Vortian...

All of the brightness swept under a dark blanket of truth: it had almost all been done before...and would be done again. All because this realm was...hopeless.

Utterly...utterly...hopeless.

But May...

He couldn't just leave her. Yes, Sude would be willing to protect her the way he wanted to protect the people of Irk, however flawed they were-

...so...SO flawed.

"But I love you so much." Senior whispered, shaking his head back and forth, his voice so hoarse. "...I love you...but I can't see how any of you could change...how I could possibly break free of all this...I just...I just want to start over..."

"Oh, Nick..."

A gentle voice.

"Nick...you don't NEED to start over..."

A familiar voice.

"All you need..."

A warm voice.

"Is to keep moving forward."

HER voice.

...
...elsewhere, Azazel watched from far away as Mortos was surrounded on all sides by the Guardians, frowning slightly, chewing on his lip as Prof. Membrane raised a plasma cannon up to his shoulder, aiming it squarely at the demon.

"Today we take back our city. Tomorrow...THE WORLD!" The professor told the camera crew that was recording the whole event, several dozen passersby using their video phones.

The Beautiful Angel couldn't stomach this. Snapping his fingers as he hid his wings with an illusionary spell, he leapt through the air, grabbing Mortos and rushing off, escaping through the back alleys of Philadelphia as Prof. Membrane gave the order for the Guardians to chase after them.

"Don't worry, I'll keep you safe from them." Azazel insisted as he cast up another illusionary spell, making it appear as though they'd vanished through a brick wall. He waited for the crowd to leave before he took Mortos' s hand, leading him through more back alleys, heading for Dib's house.

"Th-thanks, mister." Mortos admitted. "Mortos Der Soulstealer shall remember your kindness."

"Just call me Azzy." Azazel insisted gently, golden/amber eyes filled with concern as they slipped into the back door of Dib's home, Dib and Gaz looking up from their dinner at the sight of-

"YOU?! Again?!" Dib yelled, frowning angrily. "Oh, C'MON! Get this mooching jerk out of here! I've had it up to here with-

"Who're you?" Mortos pouted. "I've never seen you before in my life! And I'm NOT a MOOCH!"

"This is a Mortos from earlier in his life, before he ever met you." Azazel explained calmly. "I summoned him from a special spell, you see, and I need to hide him until I can get the spell that takes him back to his home."

"Can't we just have him grant us wishes? That's how he returned to his home last time I met him." Dib said, scratching his head as Gaz's eyes lit up.

"Wishes?"

"Yes, Mortos is a reality-warping half-human, half-demonic being." Azazel informed her as Gaz rubbed her chin, an idea coming to her. Actually SEVERAL, she had a long list of things to wish for. She immediately grabbed Mortos's hand and rushed out the door with him, Azazel blinking as she ran off.

"...well, THAT'S not good." He murmured, Mr. Thildari, aka Darithil, emerging from the living room with several DVDs, sighing as he saw Azazel.

"I take it there will be no "movie night"?" He asked Dib, shaking his head back and forth.

The doorbell rang and Darithil quickly ran back inside the living room with Dib following him, putting his illusionary human appearance back as Azazel did the same and joined them, Membrane stepping inside. "Ah, you are Dib's counselor! Good to see you again, Mr. Thildari, but-who's this?"

He gestured at the dark-skinned human near Mr. Thildari, the disguised Azazel, who waved. "My estranged son, Azi. He's from the Middle East as I am. We saw your Guadians in action this week, you're really cracking down on...well, extraterrestrial terrors?"
"Indeed. And we're searching for another. Have you seen a being like this?" Prof. Membrane asked, holding up a photograph of a frightened Mortos.

All three lied through their teeth. "Nope."

Or rather, all TWO. Dib spoke up. "That's Mortos Der Soulstealer. I read about him in an ancient pamphlet. But really dad, he's a harmless genie-like demon. He's not violent, just needy."

"PFFT! Pamphlets are stupid." Prof. Membrane insisted, frowning darkly. "And they're ALL violent. Once we catch him, we'll destroy him!" The man proclaimed, hovering off the floor slightly in a dramatic, physics-defying pose before he somehow floated out of the room, the guardians following after as Dib looked over at Azazel.

"You know, I didn't catch your real name?"

"Azazel, the Rugged Strength of God."

"Wait." Dib frowned at this. "YOU'RE a demon!"

"I WAS a demon." Azzy corrected him, waving a finger in the air, showing off his ring. "No longer."

"Odd...color..." Dib said, examining the Exemplar Ring on the former demon's hand, turning it over as he held up his own ring. "Ring, identify."

"EXEMPLAR RING CURRENTLY ALIGNED WITH THE INDIGO LIGHT, ASSOCIATED WITH THE POWER OF COMPASSION."

"Compassion? Compassion's kinda the last thing that I think would be helpful in tracking down my sister. You wouldn't be able to sense much in HER!" Dib laughed.

"Not quite. Compassion's usefulness is being able to allow the wielder to see from different sides. Like...say..."

Azazel's tattoos throbbed as he grinned. "THIS."

He snapped his fingers, a greenish image of Dib's symbol of Willpower shimmering over his head as a green hand manifested, wagging a finger in Dib's face as the human blinked in surprise. "You can...channel other rings?" Dib asked in surprise.

"Oh yes, we can. Your willpower's VERY strong." Azazel complimented. "I had to be careful it didn't take me over. We who wield the Indigo light must be wary that the emotions we channel don't control us instead of the other way around, for that's the only time we can feel anything else."

"The rings keep us from feeling anything but compassion and sympathy and kindness." Darithil explained as he pointed at his own ring. "Before I put it on, I..."

He trailed off, face darkening as he looked away in shame, Dib inwardly gulping. The alien must have been a real monster...had he really been so terrible that the only way to "fix" him was to turn him into a purple-people-healer?
But that was a thought for another time. It was time to find Mortos and get him to grant Dib a wish...

AGAIN.

...

...

...

...Burn down, burn down the Hot Topic...let the fire take control, 
Burn down, burn down the Hot Topic...Hot Topic, Burn it Down!

"Yeah, you should probably get out of here." Gaz said as she held her flamethrower up, moving past the rows of black designer clothes as the owner of Hot Topic ran for his life, Gaz setting fire to all the shelves of tacky material that gave "Twilight" fans what they needed to look like Edward. Screw them!

She was on Team JACOB.

"Across the country, Hot Topics everywhere are bursting into flames. I repeat, the Hot Topics are bursting into flames..." a mall television informed the populace of the United States as Mortos sipped on a large "Cherry Poopsi". Gaz had been slightly tempted to bring her mother back...

But she'd made peace with her mother's death. No, now she wanted to indulge in the things that normally would have gotten her arrested. Next stop...HENRY IGGINS HOUSE. She'd even had Mortos write up a song for her.

"Sing it." She told him, putting the flamethrower back over her shoulder as Mortos unfurled another STUPID pamphlet, the Hot Topic burning to a crisp as the owner was arrested for arson. Wasn't fiddling with reality FUN?

"Heh-hem. Oh the people will celebrate the glory of you, for whatever you wish and want I gladly will do!"

Gaz brushed some of her hair back, her voice like sweetness and honey. "Thanks a lot, sir says III in a manner well-bred! But all I want is Henry...Iggs...DEAD."

Mortos sighed and clapped his hands. "DONE!" said the man in stroke, British royal palace guards appearing to his right as the crowd that had gathered watch them salute. "Guards, go and bring in the bloke!"

Gaz darkly laughed, Iggins being dragged from the nearby "Lame-Stop" video game store, blindfolded and gagged with a rubber piggy. "And they'll march you Henry Iggins to the WAAAAAALL! And then he shall tell me-"

"Go and sound the call." Mortos intoned, tossing her a little pistol that fired off a cutesy "Bang" flag from inside the muzzle. The guards lined Iggins up against the nearby "Ms. Yards Cookies" as customers ran for their lives, Gaz laughing insanely.

"As they raise their rifles higher...I'll shout ready! AIM! FIRE!"
There was, naturally, more to the song, but Gaz was laughing so hard, knees buckling as she hit the ground, that it was impossible for the crowd to hear any more. Mortos held his hands over his face, groaning deeply. It's times like this that he wished he'd been tricked into being something pleasant, like a Tooth Fairy.

"GAZ!" Dib's voice yelled out, Gaz turning her head as she saw Mr. Thildari and Azazel flanking him, Azzy now in his usual appearance...save for the jacket that was keeping his wings hidden. Dib's face looked livid as he pointed an accusatory finger at her. "What do you think you're DOING?! This is my one chance to get rid of Zim and end his reign of terror once and for all, and all you can think about is petty revenge?!"

"What do you call your obsession with Zim if not a long list of grievances that you want to avenge yourself for?" Gaz asked calmly.

"This is DIFFERENT! Zim stole people's organs and stuff! All Iggins ever did was take a Game Slave!"

"Yeah, I'm pretty proud of the organs thing." Zim admitted as he calmly strode into their sight, Miyu and Two by his side, dusting fake dust off his new outfit.

"Ooooh. Looking good." Gaz complimented. "REALLY good."

"The black really compliments the orange." Dib admitted.

Zim blushed. "Awww, you're just sayin'..." He told them, putting a hand over his mouth and "tee-hee-hee-ing".

"No, really, it's-WAIT!" Gaz shook her head back and forth. "The point is that Game Slave was MINE!" Gaz snapped back.

"It's ALWAYS about YOU, isn't it! You're just as self-centered as Zim!" Dib screamed at her.

"Heh. She WISHES she could be like ZIM." Zim chuckled.

"In fact, Dad's-"

And who should burst through the glass roof above BUT Dad and the Guardians, all of them sliding down ropes as they leveled their blasters at the frightened Mortos, then at Zim, then at Two, then at Miyu.

"Oops." Zim mumbled. "Bad timing."

"Or PERFECT timing, depending on who you ask." Prof. Membrane said calmly as he addressed the crowd of mall walkers. "As I promised, I intend to rid the world of alien threats. I owe so much to you, son. You helped me see the light." He complimented Dib, ruffling his hair before turning back to Mortos. "You. I remember YOU." He growled at Zim. "My son was right about you, you ARE an alien, and so are your friends..."

"He's my DAD, not my FRIEND." Two said immediately.
"You?! REPRODUCED?" Prof. Membrane asked Zim, Gaz snorting slightly at this as Zim pouted.

"Sh-shut up!"

"Doesn't matter now...Mortos Der Soulstealer. I'm willing to be...lenient...if you aid us in this. My son told me about the Exemplar Rings, I'm not sure our lasers will work, but if you, well, just grant my wish to kill them, we'll go easy on you."

"Uh, how?"

"I'll kill you after lunch instead of you getting dragged through a messy and humiliating public show trial, after which you'll be put to death by strychnine. It'll be quicker." Prof. Membrane said cheerily, rubbing his long-gloved hands together. "And it'll be great for my public image!"

"...you're all heart." Mortos mumbled, rubbing the back of his neck.

All about him. What a surprise, Dib though to himself. This wasn't about justice, this was about Prof. Membrane looking good.

"Dad, we can't." Dib spoke up. "I might not like Zim or care that much about those two, but...I can't just let you kill Mortos. He's...well...HARMLESS. It's the people whose wishes he grants that are dangerous."

The crowd murmured to each other. Could it be they were actually LEARNING something from this Hallmark-esque moment?

"Don't tell me you're SYMPATHIZING with him?" Prof. Membrane asked, a mortified expression flickering over his goggled face. "Do you think any of their kind even DESERVES any sympathy? Just look at him! He's...a FREAK!"

The crowd began rubbing their chins, scratching their heads, "hmming" out loud. This was getting deeply philosophical.

"So THAT'S it." Azazel growled angrily, the crowd now turning to look at him. "This isn't about right or wrong! You just hate him because he looks DIFFERENT from you. What's next? Killing someone just because they've got different eyes? Or hair? Or skin?"

Nervous expressions flickered across the Guardian's faces as Prof. Membrane held up a hand. "Now take it easy-"

"How 'bout people in WHEELCHAIRS! No legs! You gonna euthanize all the cripples in the world?!? Hey, how about MIDGETS?! Let's kill all the midgets!"

"Er...I...uhhhhh..."

"If you're going to destroy everything that's different from you..." Azazel hissed, grabbing the jacket sleeve and ripping it squarely off his body, his wings unfurling. "YOU'LL HAVE TO DESTROY ME TOO."

Gasps from the crowd. Some fell to their knees, others stepping back in surprise as Prof. Membrane's eyes bugged out so much his goggles shot clean off. "An...angel..." He whispered.
"I am the Rugged Strength of God. I'm different. But I learned to throw away my petty desires and put what really mattered first. Don't you think it's time...you did the same...and just LISTENED to your son?"

Prof. Membrane took a long look at the angelic being...then at Dib...then at Mortos.

"...alright." He said, sighing slightly as he raised hand, gesturing for his men to stand down as Zim, Two and Miyu looked on in surprise, Membrane putting a hand on his son's shoulder. "...I'm listening."

"I'm surprised." Two said softly. "...it's not just Gaz now...now you're a better man than you were in our reality."

Suddenly there was a large, cracking, RIPPING sound, the mall beginning to wildly shake as the people within stumbled around, trying to get ahold of ANYTHING to steady themselves. Dib was thrown back, landing before a sudden enormous CRACK that had opened up right in midair...

A crack in time and space.

"All of reality is breaking even further the more things drastically change..." Miyu realized. "Membrane's attitude adjustment is so DIFFERENT from the status quo this base reality is caught off guard..."

"Dib, whatever you do, don't look into the light!" Zim immediately yelled out. Hey, he might not have liked Dib, but being that close to the Schism...

But it was too late. Dib looked inside. He looked into infinity and beyond...

...

...

...

...Dib slowly rose up, feeling the eyes upon him, reading him...

READING him...

He turned his head, eyes widening slowly, mouth falling open as he gazed out at the face behind the screen.

"Oh my God." He whispered as he looked up. "Oh my GOD..."

Looked up at you.

"I...I SEE YOU!"
You know, Nick-Fool, there's a common phrase used by your world's medics. I believe it is..."This won't hurt a bit". Zim remarked.

Nick frowned at this. ...last time I heard THAT were from a dentist. And HE LIED.

"Yes, well...you should know...I'm not a doctor. Though..." Zim began to giggle madly. "Once I'm through with you, you'll reaaaaaally need one."

Nick had been caught so EASILY. His green robotic doggy thing had asked him to "come up here" and step over to him. Zim had immediately stepped right behind the Southern kid and whacked him over the head, knocking him out on the spot, then dragging him unceremoniously to his creepy basement. Now he was moments away from some sort of horrific experiment...

He'd strapped Nick in, GIR pulling out a large assembly of strange-looking, and SHARP-LOOKING tools from his head, leaving Nick to stare stupidly at a small hole in the ceiling that looked rather...glow-y...and kind of...sort of weird...

Wait...was that a...no, no, it COULDN'T have been. But he'd been SURE he saw a-

"And NOW..." Zim laughed darkly, pulling away from the power tools and holding a very special assembly kit for some horrific thing up. It looked like something that belonged in a "SAW" movie, and Nick immediately blanched, trying not to lose control of his bladder as sheer, unmitigated terror rippled through his body like shockwaves from a nuclear bomb.

"Please don't do this." Nick found himself whispering tearfully.

Zim's smile was the work of demons. He was happy. He was sick. He was some deep, dark thing that God had found lying underneath a rock and had been so disgusted with that he hadn't the courage to toss him in the trash.

"I am making the first incision." Zim said calmly, GIR holding up a tape recorder as the tool cut into Nick's head, going through hair...and through skin...and through BONE.

Nick screamed.

And screamed.

AND SCREAMED AND SCREAMED AND SCREAMED AND SCREAMED AND SCREAMED-

...by the time Dib had found him, Nick was almost totally gone. Dib held the bloodied, mumbling body of his comrade tightly to him, lifting him up and carrying him with Gaz's help as she held Nick's hand. It was the only time Dib would ever see her being so kind towards the kid. But he
understood why. Zim had done many things...

This took the cake. They could see his...Zim had actually...

It was a miracle Nick was still talking, and able to give SOME kind of report to the police. He'd been half-delirious though, and Gaz an Dib had had to make up a story on "muggers" who had attacked them, not knowing when they'd held a gun to Nick's head that he had "Dandy Walker Syndrome".

...well...he might as well have, Dib thought mournfully as Nick was wheeled into the ambulance, giving one final look at Dib, chuckling slightly. He might as well have.

"I didn't...give in, buddy." Nick managed to burble out, coughing slightly. "Did I do good?"

Dib stood on the sidewalk for what seemed to be many, many hours as he kept watching the horizon, looking in the direction that the ambulance had gone.

Yeah...you did good, solider.

...you did good...

GIR happily bounced through the park in the back of the mall, Minimoose floating by his side as Dib and Mortos were led away by his dad, Zim and the others long gone. Gaz was sitting on a park bench, sipping on a Suckmunkey Slushee. Noticing her, GIR walked up to her with a bag he'd pulled out of his chest compartment and he pointed at it. "Can I have a sip?"

"No, you'd cough for some weird reason and get "dog germs" all over it." Gaz said bluntly, Minimoose sitting nearby as she let HIM take a sip from it to spite GIR, who just "harrumphed" and fiddled around with the contents inside his little bag.

Spring is here, spring is here! Life is skittles and life is beer! I think the loveliest time of the year is the spring, I do! Don't you? Course you do!

Gaz blinked stupidly as GIR held up several dozen peanuts, continuing to sing as he tossed them out for the birds. But there's one that makes spring complete for me! And makes every a Sunday a treat for me!

Several of the pigeons suddenly began hacking and coughing before they promptly exploded where they stood, GIR happily skipping around them all. All...the..world seems in tune on a spring afternoon when we're poisoning pigeons in the park! Every Sunday you'll see my sweetheart and me as we poison the pigeons in the park!

"...you...are a FREAK." Gaz mumbled as GIR kneeled down by one stupid pidgeon that plucked a peanut right from his palm.

When they see us coming, the birdies all try and hide! But they still go for peanuts when coated with cyanide! He sun's shining bright, everything seems alright when we're poisoning pigeons in the park!

"That's...even for ME, this is..." Gaz then sighed. "Then again, tt's not against any religion to wanna dispose of a pigeon."
"Yep! Let's murder them all among laughter and merriment except for the few we take home to EXPERIMENT!" GIR offered. "I'll pay you fifty bucks!"

"...okay." Gaz sighed. "Deal."

... meanwhile, the streets of Irk were becoming a battlefield. The many hordes of different emotional factions were running wild as can be. Agent Orange, aka Peech and her host Pyrsist, was the most aggravating...she kept stealing everything that wasn't nailed down, despite Chulainn and the Red Helm's hordes best misguided attempts to stop her.

"I SAID PUT DOWN THAT POWER GENERATOR!" Knightly roared out, clenching her long-gloved fist tightly and shaking it in Peech's direction, her Exemplar Ring glowing brightly as her husband nervously twitched nearby as Knightly dodged an oncoming assault of orange laser blasts, Peech cackling madly with Pyrsist carrying her through the air, her fellow thieves rushing out of the "Electronics R' Us", having taken advantage of the special TV sale: steal one, get one free!

Michael reaaaaally wanted in on this. He really, REALLY wanted in. Luckily Knightly knew how to get his mind off stealing things. She handed him hard liquor as the two of them beamed themselves back up to Lard Nar's ship, arriving in the cafeteria as Michael chugged away at his Vortian Fire Whiskey. Sarong was sitting with Lard Nar as the two were in a fierce debate.

"Alright..." Lard Nar sighed, putting his coffee down on the table and taking a deep breath. "I don't even see HOW you can possibly debate this."

Sarong raised his tentacles in the air, a slight glow emanating from his body. "I know, I know."

"Batman is INFINITELY cooler." Lard Nar proclaimed with an air of finality.

Sarong rolled his eyes again. "Are you kidding? Without his toys, Batman's NOTHING."

Lard Nar promptly poked the Meekrobian in the chest. "Which makes him infinitely studlier, he's got GUTS! And his costume is far cooler!"

"I'll concede the costume." Sarong admitted, sighing deeply. "But if I had an uzi pointed at my genitals, I wouldn't want "guts"! I'd want bullet-impervious SKIN!"

"Okay, okay, but let's not forget the alter-ego factor!" Lard Nar insisted, waving a pointy finger in the air. "Tell me you'd not rather be a millionaire playboy than a mild-mannered reporter? Plus, I'd take Catwoman over Lois Lane any-"

"We've got a problem. Peech is going out of control. Dite can't stop her. She's TRYING, but..." Knightly sighed, putting one hand over her face and shook her head back and forth. "And we can't find where Xeil went..."

"Peech is really intent on getting ahold of everything but the kitchen sink, eh?" Lard Nar mused calmly.
"Ahh, the youthful exuberance of idiots!" Sarong chuckled. "The planet has one week to submit to us. I'm TEMPTED to move the timetable up, but as the saying goes, "don't interfere when your enemy is destroying himself".

"What Peech does is amateur hour compared to Wiyn's divisions. About a fifth of Irk's population has followed her and..." Knightly trailed off slightly, White downing ANOTHER bottle as she tried to get the courage to speak again. "...they've...they've engaged in horrific acts of cruelty against anybody they deem "defective". Which is, essentially, everyone else."

"How fitting that so much of the army followed her. The fascinating rules and regulations that they share, and the quaint and curious costumes that they're called to wear..." Lard Nar thought out loud. "Personally, I always thought that anybody dumb enough to make a military uniform look like a dress would be a REAL defective, not some person with a striped outfit."

"Her hairs in the sink have driven me to drink!" White sang out, arms wrapped around Spleenk as they chuckled and then engaged in a deep philosophical discussion about the great masters of comedy, Moe, Larry and Curly. It was either that, or actually eat the lunch that Ixane had cooked up for everyone and, well, her taste buds had been shot off in a civil war.

Boy, the things you can do with plastics nowadays!

"Look." Knightly murmured, using her ring to manifest a DVD player as she popped a DVD inside the slot, as an Irken with heterochromia and a tight-fitting, big-boobed outfit nervously backed up against a wall as Wiyn chuckled darkly, holding up her twisted knight, tossing it back and forth between one hand, then another.

"Please, oh, please GOD, no. Don't do this, this-this isn't my fault!" She said, pointing at her chest and her eyes, Wiyn's small posse holding her arms and legs down as Wiyn coldly smirked at her, looking over at anearby small, smeet-like Irken, who was quivering on the spot.

"Well? Go ahead. This is your intitiation. Of course your kill technique will NEVER be as good as MINE, but..."

"...I...I don't...I'm not sure I should..." He squeaked out.

"STUPID!" She yelled at him. "WE DON'T NEED YOU!" She hissed, her knife slicing out, cutting his head in half as his body fell to the ground, the female booped Irken screaming in terror. "You can't bring yourself to kill." Wiyn told the dead smeet. "But I can. It's a mark of my superiority, and my AMAZING self!"

"Please, I didn't ASK to be like this, I've got a medical condition!" The booped-Irken begged tearfully, Wiyn raising the bloodied knife up as Lard Nar flinched, Sarong frowning and Knightly looking disgusted with the scene as the rest of the cafeteria stopped speaking and chatting and eating, just watching the horrid scene.

Wiyn brought it down. Hard.

"Sure you do. It's a condition that'll soon be affecting all the defectives. It's called "DYING"...soon to be DEAD." Wiyn laughed cruelly.

Knightly took the DVD out as she pocked it again, Lard Nar finally speaking up. "...why does she
"Don't ask ME!" Sarong hissed. "I don't know what goes on in the mind of defectives and inferior freaks!"

He then put two tentacles over his mouth, the cafeteria gazing at him in horror over the words he'd uttered. "...oh God. I'm starting to sound like HER."

"My husband and I owed the Wing a favor, and we're sticking with her, for the MOST part, out of that obligation. But I promise, the minute that that...that Annoying loud Nazi space cockroach lizard is DEAD AND GONE, we'll-wait. Wait a minute." Knightly glanced around. "Where IS the Wing, she should be here!"

"Oh, well..." Lard Nar began.

... ... ... ...

...she could remember a time when she'd felt no hope. No hope at all.

"Yo-you don't mean you plan to...do you?!" The Blue had asked, with a worried expression on her face.

"No...I mean for you to do it." The Yellow whispered. She had stared at her fellow "hostage" in the dark abyss that was their home, the thing that preyed on their sanity every day. Her eyes filled with horror. "M-Me?! I-I can't!"

"Yes. You. And you can and must do it." He responded

"But why? You know how I feel about this. I don't wanna eat anyone!" She had pleaded.

"Well....if you don't want to...I'LL do it. And I can make it...unpleasant..." The Yellow whispered, glancing back towards the twins without them noticing, then back at the Blue. 

"Y-you...you wouldn't. No, PLEASE! Don't force this on me!" She had begged. The alien named Jane began to walk towards them, scratching her perfectly smooth head.

"Uh, Mr and Mrs. Tallest? What's going on?" Jane questioned. Neither of them spoke. The Irken alien stood up in the near-infinite abyss and began to walk over to her and her brother with a sinister smile on her face. "Mr. Tallest...?"

He walked over to Jane and grabbed her by the arm causing Jane to give a slight yelp in surprise. She began to panic, she knew something was wrong. Jake stopped gawking at the "sky" overhead, which was really more poor, trapped souls on a different "level" of the "abyss" and noticed his sister in trouble and ran over to her. She was scared...she didn't know what this Irken was going to do to them...she just knew she was serious.

"STOP! I...I'll...I'll do it...just...please...stop..." The Blue had spoke out clearly. Her fellow Irken glanced back at her over her shoulder. "Let go of her...Jane, Jake...please...come over here..." She
lowered her head to hide her face as the Yellow released the hold on Jane and backed off. Jake just stared at him, angry for touching his sister, but confused about the situation. Jane stepped away from and ran over to the Blue, who she still trusted as Jake hesitantly followed after his sister and both stood before the Irken, who stared back at the Yellow, who calmly kept his distance.

"Please...bear her no resentment...I'm sure he was only trying to help me..." The Blue muttered as she stood next to them.

"Help you? What do you mean?" Jake questioned turning his attention towards her.

"I'm not really...normal...not anymore...and...and if I want to continue to live on...If I wish to keep my mental consciousness, and one day regain my original body in this blob we've been trapped in...I..." The blue-eyed Irken chewed her lip. "I...need to...eat other people...but it's a thought that's been haunting me ever since." Jake and Jane now both gasped to her. The Blue embraced them both in her arms and the three of them fell to their knees.

The Blue began to cry. The twins sat there beside her speechless and confused. "I'm sorry it had to be you two...just as I'd be sorry if it were anyone else...the only thing I can do is promise it won't hurt...and...and at least, I can be here with you till the end..." The Blue's arms began to spread over both their bodies at the same time. Jake and Jane jumped and fearful expressions all over their faces. They didn't scream or struggle, but were afraid. The Blue hesitantly spread down their bodies and enveloped their lower half completely as the two Modians stared at The Blue, noticing tears pour down her cheeks. They were afraid for their lives, but couldn't help but pity her.

"I'm...I'm SO sorry." The blue-eyed tall insectoid alien whispered as it engulfed their chests leaving only their heads outside the liquid. The Yellow came over and stood beside The Blue, it's face solemn. It seemed to find no humor in the situation as his "partner" continued to cry.

"...though I take you children painlessly...believe me when I say that for me this is the most painful thing I've ever done..." The Blue engulfed their heads in her ooze, Jane yelping slightly as the slime consumed her. Both now sat floating inside the blobs that extended from The Blue's arms, The Blue bringing them together so they could be together in their last moments. As she watched them both embrace each other bracing themselves for whatever came next, The Blue began to make them become one with her. Their bodies began to dissolve inside The Blue, still embraced in each other's arms. True to her word, the process was a painless one as their consciousness left them and their bodies became one with what little remained of The Blue's, serving to make sure the shell she walked around in would remain.

The Yellow watched them leave existence before placing his hand on The Blue's shoulder to comfort her.

"You did a good job." The Yellow spoke, as The Blue sat there sick to her stomach at what she did.

"Then why does it hurt so much..."

No. She had not seen any hope for atoning for what she'd done, least of all for...for those actions...

Until...

The light.

The light had SPLINTERED the abyss. The blue light had bathed over her as she'd felt the ring fall
into her hands...felt herself becoming transformed the same way the Yellow was transformed as it and the Blob merged, merged with the yellow light...

She had changed.

But...more importantly...she had survived.

In life...there was hope...

"My...Lady..." Senior whispered as he rose, then fell to his knees before the beautifully-regal-dressed blue-eyed Tallest, former Tallest of the Empire, and one of the best, without a doubt. She was no longer two-clawed, and looked very young and healthy, with a fine cloth that looked vaguely mystical covering her head and a gown/robe of different shades of blue covering most of her body, save the top of her chest, which showed off a large tattoo of the symbol of hope. She wore glittering silver bracelets on her wrist, and her entity, Psyche of Hope, fluttered overhead, a big, bright, BEAUTIFUL-looking butterfly.

Peech, who was watching in secret with Pyrsist, noticed her entity was smiling slightly. "What is it?" She asked as they ducked back behind a large statue of Spork.

"Roald Dahl said that it didn't matter if you had a chubby stomach or a wonky smile, if you thought happy thoughts rays would shine out your face and you'd always look lovely. Psyche's just like that...she always looks lovely, no matter how ugly her appearance might seem initially. She's a great old gal."

"I didn't know you were a fan of Dahl." Peech admitted. "I enjoy his poems, personally. I like to write my own, want to hear one?"

"Sure!"

"I remember that first day, a single sun shined overhead, when I first reached out to you. You shoved me away, I, unsurprised, could see the hurt within your eyes, and there and then, You became my fr-"

"You always had a lovely voice. It's a shame you never used it more." Senior spoke softly as Peech and Pyrist nervously turned around to see the communications officer tenderly smiling at the two with Miyuki by his side. "By all means, please go on, I LIKE poetry!"

"...YOU HEARD NOTHING!" Peech yelled defensively, shrilly, rushing off with her entity as Nick turned back to Miyuki.

"You're "The Wing of Hope"...how?" He asked. "Weren't you...EATEN?"

She laughed slightly. "Nom-nom-nom'd indeed. It's a looooonng story and involves a multi-layered digestive tract, several dozen Salsa dancers and a gang war that ended in cavities..." She went on, waving a dismissive hand in the air. "A long story."

Senior frowned slightly. "If you're here to "convert me" to the Resisty, it won't work. I don't have it in me to join anything or fight alongside anyone, no matter what the cause is." He mumbled, rubbing the back of his neck as he and Miyuki continued walking down the hall, finally stopping...ironically, at Miyuki's statue. "This realm doesn't want people like me, my Lady. It doesn't need me."
"Oh, you don't believe that, silly-nilly!" Psyche's cheery voice insisted as her antennae bobbed low over his head, giving him a head-rub. But not even this shameless display of cuteness would cheer him up. He held his gloved hand over his face, his voice low, broken...

Defeated.

"Please, don't...try to cheer me up. I'm a DINOSAUR. I don't BELONG here. This is not my world! It doesn't NEED people to be heroes! It doesn't NEED people to be guiding lights! It doesn't NEED..." He struggled to get the words out, croaking faintly, "Safety...nets..."

"Really?" Miyuki asked softly, putting a single, gentle hand on his shoulder as she smiled down at him. "Because I was yours. And if I remember, you turned out to be not that bad a leader."

He stiffened, slowly turning to look up at her, his hand falling away from his face as she cheerily smiled.

"Now...I think there's a friend of mine who'd like to talk some things out with you." Psyche butted in, floating down the hall, soon coming back with Sude as he rose on her back. "Hope is almost NEVER out of sight from Life, my friend! Sude and I go waaaaaaay back like Pyrsist and Chulainn go way back."

Speaking of, Pyrsist was sitting on a tree on a hill outside of the palace as Peech continued to recite her poetry from a small notebook she always kept with her. Usually she snuck jewels and other little things in her jetpack's compartment, being the little kleptomaniac she was, but this was something different. And Chulainn sat atop the palace, resting his horned head atop thick, clawed hands as Dite sat nearby, her entity listening quietly...actually SITTING STILL for a change.

Call "Ripley's Believe it Or Not"!

"The same platoon, the same maroon, the outfit, heart and brain, they were the same. And I said I'd be there, standing by, from here until eter-ni-tie, For I am you, and you are I, and we are both the same... We are both the same..." Peech read on.

"Ahhhhhh. POETRY." Chulainn whispered happily. "Back when I was much younger, I considered myself a warrior-poet, you know." He told Dite. "I used to share my verses with her."

"She sounds like she's gushing over...someone special." Dite admitted, frowning slightly. "Truth be told, I always kinda suspected Peech was...one of those."

"One of what?"

"You know. One of THOSE!" Dite murmured nervously, a blush coming underneath her horned helm as Chulainn scratched his head.

"Rice-a-roni?"

"Read-my-lips, bucko-" Dite began.

...
"Look, I'm...I'm not comfortable with this." Senior mumbled as he sat atop a skyscraper roof, resting on Sude's shoulders, riding piggyback as Psyche fluttered nearby, Miyuki crawling up to join them. The green-eyed communications officer was understandably weirded-out by the way her limbs were stretching out. "Is that...er...a leftover from-

"Being eaten by an Infinite Energy Absorbing Blob? Yes." Miyuki admitted, making a little circle out of her arm as she giggled slightly, using her blue ring to make little bubbles float through the ring. "And when HE bonded with the blob, he gained the same sort of power. Unfortunately it bit off a bit more than it could chew when it tried to take in Xeil. Even a blob can feel fear..." She murmured softly.

"Spork is still alive as well?" Senior asked, eyes widening. "Darn it. I'd hoped he would be dooky by now-wait, don't distract me!" He yelled, wildly waving his hands in the air, shaking his head back and forth. "I was FORCED into this! You keep asking me to be ripped away from my friends...I lost my FAMILY, dammit, this...this isn't fair."

He lowered his head, covering his face in his gloved claws as Sude gently lowered him to the roof, hugging him gently, resting his head upon his charge's. For many, many hours he seemed to say nothing as the sun began to slowly sink.

"Nick." He finally spoke up. "Let me tell you a story."

"...go ahead."

"Once upon a time, there was a young, brave soul who loved life and everything in it. He had friends. Family. Thousands loved him. He was powerful, he was handsome, and his world...was beautiful. And perfect."

"...go on."

"Then, one day, he was visited by forces even more powerful than he. The Force of Fate itself informed him of his destiny: to turn to the side of darkness, and become a strict tyrant over the land, to spy on all and reign over all with an iron fist. The soul refused steadfastly, though the Force of Fate thought this amusing. He could not deny destiny."

"...and?"

"The soul simply stayed the way he was. He did nothing different, didn't try to run, didn't try to find a way to kill Fate, he simply went about his life. He never became a tyrant. But because he didn't, another rose to fill the void, one that would have been stopped...had that first poor soul heeded Fate's words. If he had been the sort of being who had always known what his people were doing, ready to crack down at a moment's notice, the tyrannical beast would never have risen to power in the first place. And so, the soul's world was lost because of this...lost in civil war as it burned...and burned...and..."
"T-the point, the point is that..." Sude rubbed his eyes and sighed deeply. "It's..."

"That even if you CAN defy fate, you usually shouldn't?"

"Not exactly. More like "just because you CAN do something doesn't mean you SHOULD"." Sude admitted.

"If he had just listened to that ol' Pussycat's warnin' and hoped for the best, everythin' would have worked out just fine, but because he didn't trust in the future, he lost it all. The saying goes that you can't avoid your destiny, only choose to meet it. That in itself isn't true ALL the time." Psyche admitted. "But usually, if you just choose to meet things, the world tends to unfold as it should."

Senior rubbed his chin, glancing down from the skyscraper. "...so I should stop feeling sorry for myself, get off my hiney, and go stop Wiyn down there from setting Xeil on fi-

"XEIL!"

"Why are you doing this?!" Xeil begged beneath her black hood, quivering in fear. "You and I, we're so much alike! Stop listening to the prejudice you have within you, the fear you feel...think with your head!"

"And I'm your TALLEST!" Spork's voice hissed out from Xeil's spectral form as it briefly flickered inside the specially-built butterfly net that Wiyn had designed, insane genius that she was.

"SHUT UP." Wiyn hissed at Xeil as one of her many troops handed her a lighter, and she calmly flicked it open. Though she felt Earth culture DISGUSTING and INFERIOR, she could admit that "burning at the stake" had some entertainment value. She wanted to see Xeil "snap, crackle, pop". "You've allowed yourself to be bonded with...an inferior being that is the physical embodiment of an EMOTION. We don't need you!"

"You know...that's no way to treat a lady!" Sude's harmonious voice rang out as he barreled down like a jet plane from the top of the sky scraper, Nick falling dramatically alongside him, twisting and spiraling, finally landing with a dramatic "THRA-KRAM", creating a crater as he smushed one tall Irken colonel, slowly rising up as he leveled his Colt Anaconda pistols at Wiyn and her flunkies.

"Indeed. Let's see how you withstand a discussion of WHOLESOME PRINCIPLES!" Senior agreed as he and the Entity of Life rushed forward, Miyuki nodding in approval from above with Psyche watching on.

"Life is tough!" Sude laughed as he leveled a quick and swift series of punches to one Irken and his friend, knocking them into their friends. "And suffering builds character!"

Wiyn tried to wrest the guns away from the communications officer, but he growled and kicked her square into the wall. "Nothing worth having ever comes easy!"

Several Irkens screeched as Sude promptly FLATTENED them beneath his enormous butt, arms folded, calmly smiling."Virtue...is it's own reward."

Senior knocked out the last of Wiyn's flunkies, save for one that was creeping up behind Sude, thinking the dragon didn't notice him. True, Sude didn't...but HE did. He launched himself through the air at this would-be assassin, booted foot flying out. "And when I was your age!!!
THA-THWOCK!

The Irken hit the ground and groaned as Senior leveled one Colt Anaconda .45 at him, growling sharply. "People RESPECTED their seniors."

Sude clapped at this, chuckling as Senior knocked the Irken grunt out with a harsh kick, twirling his guns and putting them back in their holsters as the draconic entity put a hand on his shoulder. "THAT, my friend, is how you do it."

"Oh, you can just be SO skilled." Wiyn whispered coldly, twirling her knives around in her hand before she launched herself out of the wall at Nick, barreling into him. "And SO quippy!" She added darkly, slicing at his stomach, barely missing as he kicked her off, Sude giving he and Wiyn some room as they circled each other.

"Use your ring on her!" Sude called out. As the communications officer chewed his lip, thinking it over for a few moments before he shook his head.

"No," Senior insisted. "No. I finish this with my own two hands. That's the way it has to be. I need to EARN the right to wear the ring."

With that, he launched himself through the air, reaching into his belt pouches, tossing out small, black-colored little round explosive capsules. They shattered and blasted apart in the air around Wiyn as she sadistically cackled, jumping backwards, landing on one hand as she whipped out another wicked-looking knife. "So very FAST! Past thought! Past instinct! You simply act! But you're not the only one with TOYS!"

She launched something at him and he ducked, but it curved through the air, wet and sloppy and...like GLUE?

"I've got something that'll have you glued to your seats! I call it GLUE." She chuckled, a gluey substance sticking to the communication officer's back...attached to something in a small rocket launcher which she raised up. With a roar of thunder, Nick was yanked through the air, slamming onto a roof above along with the rocket as Wiyn leapt up through the air, propelled by her mechanical spider legs as Jayd, Dite and Maht arrived in time to get Xeil free, Peech watching the fight from a nearby roof, eyes slowly widening as she looked on.

A THA-THWOCK knocked Wiyn back as Senior quickly freed himself from the gluey rocket, launching himself at her, kicking her squarely in the gut as she hissed at him. "Yes, on the roof, a proper fight. But ask yourself...why do you oppose my superiority? Don't you recognize my MIGHT!?"

"You're getting your through intimidation, fear and killing! YOU'RE JUST A MURDERER!!" He yelled at her.

"I call it PEST CONTROL!" She hissed back at him, spinning around, trying to slash him with her PAK legs as he danced around the roof to dodge her ensuing assault.

"Yeah, people like you would...no, no, that would be an insult to people. I've got to stop treating you like one." Senior mumbled, whipping out his pistols and firing them off at her again as she stood her ground to deflect them time and time again.
"At last, one thing you FINALLY get right! NONE of us are people, you inferior FOOL!" She snarled, suddenly catching him off guard as she fired off a sharp laser blast that tore into his side, making him gasp out in pain as she fired off more in his direction. Senior ran for his life around the roof, panting heavily, dark green lifeblood dribbling out of the wound in his side to splatter on the rooftop below.

"I DESPISE your naïve and optimistic idealism, your persistence! No longer am I satisfied with simply standing back and watching as your life rips itself in two! Your revelation on this world’s true state of being came before I, but instead of accepting it, you stupidly try to change things! Subtle KINDNESS! Long-distance string-pulling you stupidly call "compassion"! Even some force you idiotically call "justice"! People like you don't deserve to exist!"

Nick suddenly leapt through the air, spinning around and whipping out his pistols as he fired off two shots. They shot sideways through the air, striking Wiyn's shoulders, her screeching, banshee-esque voice bellowing in pain as she reeled back, Senior twirling his pistols as he raised his fists up.

"You want me dead, you great-green-globs-of-greasy-grimy-gopher-guts, you're going to have to do MUCH! BETTER! THAN THAT!"

Wiyn ripped out bombs from her belt, snarling as she launched them through the air, red and white and range blasts exploding all around the communications officer as her eyes narrowed darkly."Time and time again you get back up! Under that costume you're just flesh and blood! Yet time and time again you keep moving forward! WHY?! WHY-WHY-WHY?!!"

"Because I have faith...I have hope...that the Irken people can become...good." Senior spoke resolutely, stepping through the blasts, a triumphant gleam in his eye, the others watching in surprise...

All save for Tak, who widened her eyes as her host turned to her. She who housed the Green stiffened at the sight of Jayd's mentor moments staring a a horrific, space-Nazi-induced death in it's very, very ugly face.

"Tak?" Jayd asked gently.

"You must be smarter than the rest of them..."

She'd meant it in more ways than one...it hadn't just been a matter of "the enemy of my enemy". This had been different. He had been an equal, or as close to an equal as possible...

In another time...another place, maybe...

She remembered clear as day the day that the applications for positions on-board the Massive had been filed, and he had first met them all. Their first day...with Jayd so very nervous as she hid her essence in the nanogenes he carried in his body.

She remembered clear as day those words. "Consider me...your safety net."

And that smile. The light in his eyes. Intelligent. Supportive.

...he would be there for them. She knew this. And she wanted that.

She wanted someone to just BE there for her...that had been why...
"We need to be there for him." She said firmly, leaping through the air, carrying Jayd with her.

"WE! AREN'T PEOPLE!" Wiyn snarled as she ripped up a chunk of roof and tossed it right at Senior, flattening him to the ground and leaping through the air to pin him down. "Stop pretending to be something you can't be! WE'RE ALL JUST ROBOTIC BUGS!" Wiyn screeched down at Senior hysterically.

"Correction! YOU are a bug! But ME?!

Wiyn looked up to see Jayd's emerald fist raised, streams of power surging off his body as a helix of swirling green might rushed at her.

He did his duty.

"I AM A MAN!"

THUDDA-SPLORECK!

Peech, hiding from a nearby rooftop gasped.

No.

Wiyn felt the sticky wetness emerging from her stomach, her squeegly-spoolch slowly sliding out, half-broken like her ribs, coughing up dark green blood as she began to chuckle...and to laugh...and laugh...and laugh.

"You think...this ENDS it? Not a chance!" She threw her head back, cackling madly. "NEVER! You think you can KILL me?! You can never kill me! I'm the thing that haunts your dreams! Gives you no peace! I will ALWAYS BE BACK! I WILL ALWAYS-

She staggered back, her splooch sliding out of her stomach as she burbled almost incoherently, Nick raising the very same Colt Anaconda he'd used on that mook of an Irken that had threatened Maht in the bar, that same day he'd first met Sude.

"How does it feel to have everything you've stood for slip out of your fingers, Wiyn? How does it feel...to watch dreams die?"

His aim was true.

...

...

...

...Peech slowly rocked back and forth on the rooftop as Dite sat near her, one hand on her shoulder as the tears flowed freely down "Agent Orange's" eyes, splattering on the dress she wore, her once-pretty face now haggard from wailing for hours.

The sun began to set in the orange sky as Dite gently patted her shoulder before asking...
"...can I hear the rest of your poem?"

Chulainn and Psyche watched as Peech wiped her eyes, croaking out the last of the poem...

Though you and I were so alike, sharing a sun that t'was the same,
I can see you standing in my mind, orange and green, you and I,
Orange and green, you and I...
You were my wind, you raised me up, that much I know is true,
But I now know you can't forgive...

Peech trailed off as a pair of dark green eyes lingered in her mind...

The love I gave to you...
The Machine without Fear

Zim tried to wave enthusiastically in Gaz's direction as she approached his house, Dib having him in a headlock with a socket wrench half-embedded in the middle of his head as GIR stood nearby, absent-mindedly sipping on a Suckmunkey Slushy of chocolate bubblegum. See, the Dib-Stink was kinda cutting off his air supply, and Gaz-Beast was usually quite happy to-

"Dib, Dad wants us to fix the floor in the middle of the kitchen. You know, the one that GIR dug?"

"...my friendship tube?" GIR said suddenly, dropping the slushy to the ground and whimpering at the idea of losing his beloved friendship tube. "But how ELSE am I gonna visit you, Gazzy?"

An idea then popped into his head and he quickly began going "Ooo, ooo", waving his hand in the air and bouncing up and down. "I know! I'm gonna builds a zip-line." He wrenched the top of his head open and pointed at a spike-launcher within, several dozen feet of powerful metallic rope attached.

"Can I help?" Dib found himself asking. Truth be told, Zim had half a metallic spider-leg from his PAK embedded in his leg, and he was about to pass out from blood loss.

"Sure! You can help, and so can GIR...AND THAT'S IT." Gaz finished, giving a baleful glare at Zim as the other two walked off, Zim panting as he fell to the ground, clutching his throat and hacking.

"Why are you acting this way? I am ZIM! You've always supported me and-"

"You know, Zim...I remembered something you said once. You said it was silly how Earth has an army that's devoted to the defense of nations, not to the invasion of ones." Gaz spoke quietly, folding her arms. She seemed much older now...and...tired.

"Yes, you humans are so RIDICULOUS not taking advantage of your armed troops, PITIFUL THOUGH THEY ARE COMPARED TO THE MIGHTY IRKEN RACE!" He added, waving a claw in the air above his head.

"Yes, I guess we humans actually mature as we grow older." Gaz said, shrugging as she walked off.

"Yes, I guess you-wait...huh?" Zim blinked stupidly, looking in her direction as she walked off.

"...Gaz Beast, wait, what's-?"

"You went too far with HIM, Zim." Gaz angrily growled back. "I'm all for the exploitation of the stupid. But what you did..." She slowly shook her head back and forth. "I'm bringing...flowers..." She said the word like it was poison to her. "To him...today. In the hospital. He likes seeing "the pretty lady"." She almost blushed at the compliment. His Southern Accent COULD be charming...

"And if I see you trying to "finish the job"...I'll finish YOU."

Zim sat in the fortress of the Minor Arcana, one hand held over his head, the other loosely gripping a photograph taken of him and Gazeline Membrane on the night of the dance. THAT dance. That special moment where, for a few brief seconds in time, he had lost himself utterly in his role as the perfect, gentlemanly courter of "Gazzy". Where, for a few brief moments in time, he'd felt like things were finally where he needed them to be. Everything had been positively...perfect.
All of that was gone. Long gone. But he wanted that feeling he'd gotten from so long ago. He wanted it so...so...much. And Miyu, The Suit of Swords of the Major Arcana, had finally come into contact with the being they needed who had just the information they needed to bring about the reality they needed.

For you see, Johnny, Homicidal Maniac, age 42, was also an avid collector and studier of demonic lore. In fact, he had a collection of the original "Dracula" manuscript. Dib would have been proud. He now sat in the main hall, sitting by the avidly-listening Cass with the others as Two drew his rainbow-colored security blanket that he kept hidden in his vest to his lips, biting into it as Miyu and Zim sat near each other.

"As we looked, there came a terrible convulsion of the earth so that we seemed to rock to and fro and fell to our knees. At the same moment with a roar that seemed to shake the very heavens, the whole castle and the rock and even the hill on which it stood seemed to rise into the air and scatter in fragments."

"Geeeeeeez." Two whimpered out, antennae/hair standing on end.

"From where we stood it seemed as though the one fierce volcano burst had satisfied the need of nature and that the castle and the structure of the hill had sunk again into the void. We were so appalled by the suddenness and the grandeur that we forgot to think of ourselves." Nny read on.

"Observation: It is a good thing that Bram Stoker did not live to witness such tasteless and lukewarmly horrendous sequels like "Zoltan, Hound of Dracula" or "Dracula 3000". If he had known of any of these movies, he quite likely would have killed Count Dracula on page 1." Miyu said in her slightly metallic and overwhelmingly condescending voice, waving a long-gloved hand in the air.

"Indeed. I do hope you all enjoyed that little reading though. Usually the dead slabs of meat on my wall just "squick" when I try to recite a page. And don't even get me STARTED on what the Monster in the Walls thinks is "entertainment"!" Nny went on.

"...monster in the what?" Zim asked.

"Well, to get him to come out, first I need to take a five year old. Then I tie him up. Then I scalp him. Then I take his guts and-"

"OKAY, THAT'S ENOUGH!" Two announced, standing in the air and holding his hands up. "We asked you here because you said you had access to the thing Azazel had mentioned several times as being an "unholy piece of Satanic Ritual Magic I refuse to use for any reason". If he hated it that much, it must be very bad, very powerful, and you said you had it. Do you have it, or not?"

"Ah, you mean the "Wheel of Plagues"!" Nny laughed darkly as his black ring glistened, and a construct of a large stone wheel with various locks embedded within it in a circular pattern hovered in the air. "The Wheel of Plagues is an ancient mechanism that holds the genetic codes of dozens of terrible diseases. I happen to have the Wheel, but the keys needed...are blood. Blood of-"

"The innocent?" Two inquired. "Miyu, go out and run a children's school bus off the road."

"Statement: You have me all wrong. I am more than just the same joke over and over. You are thinking of GIR." Miyu commented.
"FOUR OF MY FIVE HEARTS ARE YOOOOOURS!" GIR sang out as he sat with Nick on a brick wall near the sidewalk, Torque Smacky's blood splattered all over him as Nick nervously passed him another Suckmunkey Slushy praying to GOD the robot didn't kill him or do what he did to Tommy Chestnut. And if I DESCRIBE what he did to Tommy Chestnut, I would not be able to sell this book in Wal-Mart. Have we reached an understanding?

"AND I BURIED THE FIFTH IN MY BACKYARD!" The robot finished.

"Actually, no. It needs the blood of Seraphi, the race that imprisoned the beings who created this Wheel..." Nny said calmly.

"Well, we'd better hurry and FIND some. Nothing is more annoying the naïve persistence of heroes. I'm sure, even know, the Dib-Stink and his friends are thinking up ways to defeat us even as we speak!" Zim growled, clenching his claws.

... ... ...

...Dib held his head in one hand, mumbling and babbling incoherently as his eyes focused and unfocused behind his glasses. Gaz shook him slightly, Prof. Membrane waving his gloved hand before his son's face as Mortos and Azazel stood nearby, Azazel rubbing his chin. "It appears as though he understood the "Truth" that lay within the Schism." He murmured solemnly as Dib finally rose up.

"I...KNOW." He murmured, looking around at the world around him. "It's all so CLEAR." He whispered as he turned to Gaz. "Gaz, I GET it now, I finally understand! We have to tell the masses!"

He immediately took off running, waving his hands around in the air and screaming like a madman about "Deviantart" and "Fanfiction.Net" as Prof. Membrane sighed deeply, putting his head in his hands. "My poor, insane son..."

"What...the hell...just happened?" Gaz growled at Azazel, a red glow flittering up from her ring.

"Well, Gaz...there's a bit of a quote I think will help you here. Give a man a fish, and he'll eat for a day." The Suit of Wands of the Major Arcana said calmly. "But TEACH a man to fish and he shall eat for a lifetime."

"...you're gonna teach me to FISH?!" Gaz snapped.

"No, no. I'm going to teach you how this world works." Azazel said as Prof. Membrane and the others in the mall all looked at the Beautiful Angel in surprise. "But before we begin...are you thirsty?" He asked Gaz.

She stood there, blinking. What kind of stupid game was he playing? Fine. She'd play along. She shrugged and rolled her eyes. "I GUESS."

"Well, would you like some..."
Azazel whipped his hand to the side as a man in a large sombrero with a small, button nose, a black mustache and a donkey with many saddles made their way over, a hot brew of java in the man's hands. "RICH COLUMBIAN COFFEE? Made with hand-picked beans chosen fresh by Juan Valdez!"

Gaz gaped as the man poured her father some coffee, Prof. Membrane nervously nodding at the man as he went to go give coffee to other people in the mall. She then turned back to the alien, folding her arms. "What...was THAT?"

"Let me ask you a different question...how come you never scratched yourself more often with the claws you used to have for hands?" Azazel inquired.

"WHAT claws I used to-"

Azazel held up a scrapbook, pointing squarely at Gaz and Dib's little, pointed...hands. He smiled calmly. "This...is not a pipe." He laughed.

"...uhhhh..."

"Or perhaps you'll remember the time when Iggins was forcibly sent barreling down an elevator in a most Looney-Tunes esque fashion?" Azazel inquired.

"Yeah. Heh...Looney Tunes." Gaz chuckled, rubbing the back of her neck. "I loved that show. You know, that dumb bird was HILARIOUS, always tricking Wile E. Coyote out of a dinner every time, and Bugs and Daffy's Elmer-Hunting season-"

Suddenly her eyes popped open wide, her mouth almost freezing in place as she finally realized "it". "Wait. Wait. That whole "falling down the shaft" thing WAS cartoony...just like the sudden appearance of Sombrero Man over there! And...and Zim going unnoticed among humans for so long...people not realizing that a green dog isn't normal...in real life, that kind of thing wouldn't make sense..."

She snapped her fingers, then slammed her fist into her palm, speaking excitedly, almost sounding just like...well...DIB!

"BUT IT WOULD IN A CARTOON! In a cartoon, things happen because they make SENSE to happen, and to keep the tale going, it makes SENSE that nobody listens to Dib and nobody believes Zim is an alien and Zim is too dumb or incompetent to ever take over the Earth! That's it, isn't it? This world is a cartoon, and it works the way that a cartoon works!" She announced, pointing triumphantly up in the air. "I've got it, haven't I?"

"Yes. It IS a cartoon." The Beautiful Angel admitted.

"YES! I AM GAAAAAAAZ!" Gaz triumphantly roared, beating her chest as people nodded sagely, clapping in appreciation of her keen mind.

"But it doesn't quite work the way you said. Oh no. Realm I-Z doesn't work the way a normal cartoon works. It works the way you EXPECT it to work."

Gaz gaped, mouth slowly hanging open as she stared at him, Mortos sipping on a "Diet Poopsi" with Prof. Membrane. Hey, he needed to lose weight! Don't judge him. When you only get called out of
your home every, say, once in an eon, you don't get much time to hit the gym, now do you?

"I...don't know what to say." Gaz murmured. "...oh...wait. I do. ARE YOU HIGH?!!" She yelled. "YOU'RE TELLING ME THAT I LOST MY MOTHER, GOT A CHILDHOOD WITH A DEADBEAT DAD AND ENDURED A BROTHER WHO WOULD NEVER SHUT UP ABOUT GHOSTS AND GOBLINS BECAUSE A PART OF ME LIKES IT?!!"

"I never said it was about what you like." The Beautiful Angel said, waving a hand in the air as he sighed slightly, folding his arms and looking to the side. "What you believe you DESERVE, though..."

"I DON'T DESERVE WHAT I'VE BEEN THROUGH!" Gaz snapped.

That made the Suit of Wands frown. "Allow me to explain something to you. You get EVERYTHING...your way. Your problem is that you think the world is owed to you. You're a greedy, rage-filled little girl. And it's not because you weren't LOVED as a child, far from it!" He told her, poking her in the chest, forcing her back over and over, past Juan Valdez as he uttered "Dios Mio" under his breath.

"It's because you're SO ego-centric that the love wasn't enough! So you pulled PIGTAILS and beat up your BROTHER and pushed the FAT KIDS into the DIRT...all so NOBODY could ignore lil' Gazzy." Azazel's golden/amber eyes were now inches away from Gaz's as he towered over her, eyes narrowed as she paled slightly. "Well...lil' Gazzy is now a teenager, and grown up, and the temper tantrums aren't "cute" anymore. When you throw stuff at people, nobody says you have a "precocious sense of adventure". When you call people names, you're not called "expressive". And deep down..."

He leaned in very...very...close. "You KNOW...you deserve every bad thing that's ever happened to you. But the worst part is, you think that your brother deserves terrible things too, even when he doesn't. And Zim thinks the same. And DIB thinks ZIM deserves terrible things happening to him even when Zim hasn't really done anything wrong. All three, no, FOUR of you are always wishing rotten luck on each other..."

Now he was whispering in her ear, hands holding her shoulders tightly. "And you'd best start hoping that NOW is the time that luck runs out..."

But a moment later, there was a loud, horrible screeching sound, the ringing of an old World War II air raid siren splitting their eardrums as Azazel's eyes widened. He quickly raced towards the crowd as Mortos ran to Gaz's side. "I'll get them out of here, keep her safe!" He yelled out as the siren grew louder and louder, Gaz clutching the side of her head and screaming...

On Irk, Senior had prayed that someone would find the ones who bore the rings on Earth. He'd hoped that they could put a stop to the Black Lantern...a uniting of Irken and human hero for a common good.

He had not expected Xeil to find the Base Earth.

And she had been all to happy to aid Nny in his plan. With a pitiless smile, she watched with cold amusement as the Vorago seeped out through the mall, with Verminthrax, Seraphi Lord of the Dark Forest letting her, Nny and the others sit atop his broad shoulders.

"How GOOD to be back here." He whispered darkly, coldly. "It's good to see somebody still
remembers the old summoning spells as well."

"I spent years with Azazel." Miyu spoke quietly, looking briefly in his direction, catching his eyes for a moment as her voice grew even softer. "...I picked up a few...as they say...tricks."

"It's a pity Peech wouldn't help." Xeil chuckled coldly. "After Wyin kicked the bucket she won't stop crying. She's gone all soft. I've got to do all the work around here...like usual." She sighed. "Who shall we destroy FIRST? The purple-haired little ape...or those annoying little flowerpots we followed her that was going to warn them? I'm dead certain they're still alive..."

...

...

...

...indeed they were.

Ms. Merrily Knightly of the planet Aroses, separated from her beloved. Vorago mist had infected all of the town, transforming it into a nightmarish reality that would have made Rob Zombie get the shivers.

She was alone in an abandoned amusement park.

Her red ring wasn't fully charged.

A giant golden crocodile had eaten her street clothes. Which had been original Versace.

And she got out of here, she was gonna kick some ASS.

The red ring she wore, the Exemplar Ring that stood for the ideal behind the power she wielded, was tied into the power of Wrath and Rage, and the Entity of Chulainn was its avatar. It had given her its blessing the same way that Miyuki had gained Psyche's blessing, even though it had not chosen her as its host any more than Pyrsist had chosen her husband Michael White-Knightly as HER host. She'd been angry the same way he'd been greedy, but the two...together...had kept their emotions fairly subdued.

They'd met, interestingly, under similar circumstances to this. Upon enduring the Schism some time ago, a driven-mad-with-knowledge Wyin, who had sought to invade Aroses, had actually enlisted the aid of a dark Seraphi similar to Verminthrax to drag the whole planet into Hell, one piece at a time.

Yet even the coldest of Sude's race had a sense of fair play, twisted though it may be. It allowed the planet's victims a chance to stop him...if they could only find him.

White and Knightly had. And they'd beaten him. Wyin had forever saken magic then.

And they had forever saken being single.

Now another dark Seraphi had been enlisted by an evil Irken. If she could find that Verminthrax...

Ugh...her head...
That siren was giving her a headache...

She fell to her knees, panting as the siren's roar slowly faded, the mist in the amusement park fading with it as a light, cool breeze ruffled her hair, which somehow soothed her nerves. It also brought her back to reality. Was her daze Xeil's doing? Was Panyck, and by extension the spirit of Spork, trying to kill her? These questions couldn't be answered. At least, not now.

Knightly slowly climbed to her feet, sniffing the air. It smelled like...burnt rubber. A crashed car. And from the precise way the smell was dissipated in the air, she presumed it had crashed a ways back. She couldn't be sure ENTIRELY of course, but her species, the Aroseans, had developed from plant life, which raised interesting questions on Valentine's Day about buying one's possible genetic material for her lover along with chocolates. Clenching her ringed fist, she set her eyes on the fading in front of her and made her way into the amusement park.

Meanwhile, Mortos kept trying to convince himself that everything would be fine.

"It's just a bar," He told himself, but an uneasy feeling grew in his stomach, and crawled all over his skin.

He was right...in a sense. "Hank's Bar", which was serving as Mortos Der Soulstealer's hiding place for the time being was usually harmless, especially during the tourist months, where was quite a popular place with friendly bartenders, cute waitresses...one of the more popular night spots that Philadelphia had to offer for its guests.

But not today. Today it seemed as though the town was offering Mortos one of its worst. The bar was desolate and dark, the mirror covered by tattered newspaper as they lay underneath stuffed heads of Mooses and Elk. Chairs and tables were overturned, as if the patrons were running away from the same thing Mortos was running from. The air was still and the half-demon could swear that there was something else in there with him as he looked around at-

...that moose head over the bar. It had turned. TURNED. It was no longer looking at the wall. It was looking at the door. The door he was standing by.

It was looking at him.

Mortos took a deep breath, steadied himself, and headed back out into the street. He hated moose. He wished they'd all be eaten. Including the head. That way nobody would ever have to have their heads stare at him!

And so, Mortos didn't notice the yellow, dripping, blood-like substance that slowly dribbled down the tattered newspaper on the mirrors. Didn't notice what it said.

"YOU'RE NEXT."

...
Well, Gaz had no map and no idea of where she was going. The tree line on either side of the road she'd ended up on seemed to be endless, the fog ever-thickening. She could swear that she heard unearthly growls and grunts, but the fog hid whatever it was. Her pace was quick, and she didn't slow down for any reason. It didn't help that her ring had been uncharged for a long, long ti-

"GRRRRWWRRRARRRR!"

Before she could even react, she was knocked down from behind. She hit the street hard, no time for her to even scream. Gaz turned toward her assailant, but saw no one directly behind her.

A growl caught her attention and she glanced skyward. She gasped and scrambled to her feet. A creature, that's the only thing she could think to call it, was flapping its wings, hovering in mid-air. Her eyes were denying the thing's existence, because she had a hard time focusing in on any distinctive features of the thing. It was like it was constantly changing its appearance, too fast for her eyes to keep up. What the hell!? A demon!?!?

It only took her a moment to realize the creature was diving for her again. She ducked to the side as the creature whizzed only inches from her head, growling and cawing right over her. It soared into the air again, giving Gaz enough time to get up again and try to escape. The creature dove at her again, but this time, changed direction at the last second and caught her from the front, knocking her onto the ground. It wasted no time in pouncing on the defenseless girl.

She put up a good struggle, gripping it's throat, throttling it as best she could. She couldn't truly make out what it's face was like, all she could hear were the growls, the snapping, gnashing teeth...she could feel hot musty breath nipping at her cheeks, its weight almost crushing her frame as it tried to get at her. "You disgusting little!!!" She snarled, her ringed hand curling into a fist. She focused her attacks at the creature's head, and bashed it over and over.

Now, against a dog or some small zoo animal, she may have defended herself well, but this creature kept attacking, getting closer and closer to her face.

THUDDA-BANG! A sharp red light tore into the thing's head. It quivered for a moment, letting out a crow-like screech before finally vanishing into dark blackish mist.

Her savior was cloaked in red. Long, vest-like straps of cloth similar to what a priest wore on his robe fluttered in the air on a skintight, pink costume with a brown belt. A pair of pinkish earrings hung from the solemn-looking woman's earlobes, with icy blue eyes gazing intently, gloves with thick, sharp-bladed knuckles clenched tightly into fists...

A red ring shone slightly in her hand.

"The name is Knightly." The woman told Gaz. "...you don't need to thank me. This is just a bad place for you to be. Period. But since you can't leave any more than I can, just stick close to me."

"I've got a ring too." Gaz said firmly, standing up. "I can take pretty damn good care of myself."

"We'll see." Knightly murmured. "...we'll see."

ELSEWHERE...

As he headed past a funhouse, his black hair flapping in the wind and wet fog nipping at his arms, scream suddenly rang out, which scared Mortos. He lost his balance slightly, and grasped onto the
nearby railing of the stairs leading inside. He quickly raced inside, looking into an enormous hall filled with mirrors, seeing the purplish-haired Zita pinned against the wall, a large figure holding her two feet off the ground by her throat.

Mortos immediately shouted "Let her go!", suddenly realizing how stupid he sounded. Like this big monster would actually drop her and surrender! This might have been a cartoony world, but the big bads inside it weren't THAT considerate.

At least it turned, showing off sown-shut eyes...and scaly skin with long, pointed nails. A gaping, reptilian mouth with a fairly humanoid head above the nostrils and a tiny set of wings embedded in the shoulders...a child from the loins of Verminthrax...half-human, half-Seraphi? No, no, they didn't look anything like this. This was some kind of cultist. It had given itself up to Verminthrax, he could tell. Tattoo on the back of it's neck, like a gang member.

Time to smoke this bitch, Mortos thought, burning black flame rising from his hands as he rushed through the air, his taloned fist catching the thing n the side of it's arms, spinning it around slightly as his other fist aimed at it's head. His fist struck home, making the head splatter apart as he panted, turning to Zita.

"Sorry 'bout the mess, miss. I'm Mortos! You are?"

"...Zita Fishmonger." She murmured, rubbing the back of her neck.

"Were you here with anyone else?"

Zita looked at him, her eyes instantly welling up with tears. Her voice came out as a hoarse whisper, "They're all dead. A...yellow THING killed them and ordered it's friends to kill me. Friends like THIS!"

"...I'm sorry." Mortos murmured, holding the little girl to his chest and patting her head.

He slowly opened his eyes...

Bloody yellow writing dripping down the mirrors...

GIR’s horrid laughter echoed in the halls.

THEY PAID FOR THEIR SINS. SO WILL YOU.

Time to leave, Mortos decided quickly as his eyes scanned the hall before venturing out of the funhouse with Zita gripping his shoulder almost too tightly. Mortos hoped that they would make it out of the horrid funpark...the darn place seemed to have turned into a haven for various monstrosities.

This was the work of that darn Verminthrax. He KNEW the digusting jerk. He was one of the dark lords that were racist against hanyou like him. He knew that eventually, they would come face-to-face with Mr. Scaly-cause-of-all-the-trouble...

Or, hopefully, with the Scaly-Stopper-Of-Such-Trouble. If they could find Sude, he could fix things. After all, Sude had stopped Verminthrax before...

GIR chuckled coldly, watching from afar as blood from Iggin's trickled down his body. He'd enjoyed
the satisfying "SNAP" of the child's neck. If only all kills could be as easy as his. Ah well. He had a feeling he'd get his chance soon. Mortos was asking Zita to come with him to find a bathroom.

Stupid girl. Didn't she know that asking to use the bathroom in a haunted location was like having sex in a horror movie?

**Dead girl walking!**

"OHHH no! I'm not going in there!" Zita's expression was as defiant as the tone in her voice. She crossed her arms and shifted her weight, a clear sign that she had made her decision and was sticking to it.

Mortos sighed, wondering why after everything that had happened, she was acting this way. This wasn't the time to be picky, he thought to himself as they stood in front of a men's restroom near a carousel. Mortos had assumed that they were going to stay together no matter where they went, but obviously, Zita didn't feel the same way.

"Zita, there's nobody in there," Mortos exasperatedly stated. "Hopefully." Mortos added, suddenly weary of going into the bathroom by himself. He had come to find solace in having another person with him. And now, the thought of having to venture into the unknown alone kept nipping at the forefront of his mind.

Zita's expression was unchanging as she spoke. "I'm not going into a guy's bathroom. They're smelly and gross. Ugh!"

Mortos had to laugh, chuckling deeply as hi belly shook like jello along with the lumpy fatty deposits in his butt. "I can't believe that with everything we've been through up to this point, you won't go in there."

"I have my limits."

Then again, so did the rating system on Deviantart, Mortos sighed. Could going into a dilapidated men's bathroom with a VERY ugly, VERY old half-demon be considered-

...if I have to ask... Mortos sighed and raised his hands in the air, giving up. Fine. Political correctness had won again. Didn't want this story getting a "warning" rating for sex. "Just stay right here then." Mortos said, looking directly in her eyes to get his point across. "If you see anything, you'll have to get over yourself and go in there. It shouldn't take me but two seconds in there, I promise. I have to see if there's something that can help us."

Zita nodded, suddenly seeming more reasonable. "If anything happens, I'll scream."

"You're going to have to do more than that," Mortos said to her as he pushed open the door of the bathroom. He disappeared behind the closing door, leaving Zita outside. She gave the door a disgusted look then leaned against the wall, hoping Mortos would come out in the two seconds he promised.

She felt a tug on her dress and looked down, blinking in surprise as GIR cheerily smiled up at her, currently in his usual blue attire.

"I feel better when I see the red water come out." He told her.
"...er...where's your parents, lil' guy?" She nervously asked, hoping to God this was just a kid in a costume and not the same robot from-

"I already PLAYED with my parents. **Now I wanna play with YOU.**" GIR chuckled darkly.

She didn't have time to scream.

...

...

...

"I'm glad you came here to us." Tak said to Dib as she hovered by Jayd, arms folded and nodding her head as she and the other Entities stood by their hosts, Dib having flown The Massive to Irk to talk directly to the Entities about what he'd seen. He was grateful, very much so, to find out he wasn't alone in this...

And glad to see Tak was back. He had honestly missed speaking to her. She'd treated him like an equal...he'd so wanted that. And with what he'd seen in the Schism...

A warmth crept into Tak's normally collected and slightly cold voice as she went on. "It truly is good to see you again, Dib. And it is good that you realized the importance of your role."

"Now, together, we can go down to Earth to halt the Black Lantern." Sude said firmly as he clenched his mighty fists and raised one high up. "Though he now covers the world with **Vorago** mist, we can defeat him yet if we can bring down Verminthrax and break the Wheel of Plagues. If we do that, all of the damage will be revered back onto **THEM**!"

"Let's see how deep the damage is, though." Feyr insisted, rubbing his chin. "It's only smart, after all. We need to know the damage control level necessary..."

"I'll show you." Senior said calmly as he led them through the Massive, walking by Tak and Jayd and Dib's side as his eyes glittered brightly. It was like old times again...

"The original Massive endured a heavy attack from the Resisty a few years back. So we had to redesign it. The new Massive utilizes it's height to maximum potential, with eight separate levels now making up what was once the Tallest's greatest refuge from the 'rabble' down on Irk." The Senior Communications Officer of the Massive crowed cheerily, waving his arms around. "We've got twelve linked T932 mainfreames, state of the art holographic projectors, high-tech training facilities, a forensics lab, a large wing for our escape pods and fighter ships, and I personally put in an observatory/library in an old storeroom. The only connecting doorway's in my room."

He led them into his silver-painted room, past a bed with a large white comforter and a poster that showed Cardinal Darithil's smiling, calm face, urging people to keep their eyes open. Another poster, which brought a smile to Miyuki's pleasant face, was her standing by the green-eyed communications officer, the caption "My Greatest Boss" beneath.

Pulling the poster up slightly, Senior pressed a button hidden in the wall as the closet nearby slid further into the wall, revealing a tunnelway that led them into a self-sustaining observatory that was hidden in the underside of the Massive. Dib walked up a set of stairs to a large telescope that popped out from the Massive as the others sat by a desk, drinking sodas Senior poured them. Dib gasped as
he peeked through the telescope, his voice becoming hoarse.

"...ever heard the phrase "slouching towards Bethlehem"?" He called out.

You see...a strain of Ebola Gulf-A had erupted over the Earth, with thousands dying. People that needed to keep things like train stations and hospitals and airplanes running were dropping dead. More horrifying still, there was the unmistakable sight...of burning chunks of land...all-too-visible, even from space he could see the burning of the Earth. Dib felt icicles sticking deep into his heart, a horrid, frightening sense of terror striking him.

"The Wheel of Plagues are torching his home the same way..." Sude trailed off as a sad look flickered across Psyche's face. She knew. She knew what story Sude had told to convince Senior...his own.

And now Earth was burning like HIS home...

"My home..." Dib whispered along with Sude.

His HOME...

"Cass...we're home, Mom. We're home." Two said happily, putting Cass's feet gently on the ground as she rubbed her golden-amber eyes, slowly opening them. All other colored had faded, yet even as she stood in the center of Hawaii, in the humble little hamlet of Kokaua Town, Two, Zim and Miyu could see some greenish color returning to her cheeks, red returning to her shirt...her tail was actually wagging again!

"I can't believe it." Azazel murmured as he and Frequency watched from a tree limb some distance away. "Enough damage has actually been done to bring back..."

"But how come there ain't no people here, brah?" Frequency wanted to know as Skoodge picked up a large chunk of dirt, Gretchen kneeling with him, concern on both their faces as Skoodge's ring analyzed the dirt.

"No pollution...no trace amounts of toxins...it's all too sterile and clean. There's no people here...except them..." Skoodge realized.

"At least it's nice out." Gretchen admitted.

"Ohh, the air's so warm..." Cass whispered out, Zim beaming happily as he clasped her hands, tears of joy coming to his face as his beloved smiled into his face.

"We did it, Cass..." He told her lovingly. "We saved you."
The Darkening Sky

A small, windowless room, empty save for a bed and a table with some equipment on it.

But something clearly wasn't right. There were straps on the bed, as if to hold someone down. And not just anybody or anything down. Something very, very small. Something that could have fit in your hand.

Walking into the room with Jourmungdr by his side, Cardinal Darithil of the consulars carried a newborn smeet wrapped in a blanket to the bed, placing it on the sheets as he rubbed his chin thoughtfully, green eyes flickering. "Hmm...this one might not need the straps, he's been very cooperative."

He petted the little thing's head as it looked up at him and the serpentine entity. "Haven't you little guy?" Darth asked sweetly in a sing-song voice. The smeet let out a happy murring sound as it cuddled up with the blanket on the bed, Jourmungdr nodding.

"Yes, I believe you will not need the straps. Let's examine it to be sure..."

He slithered over to the table, removing a scanning device attached to a tube-like thing, hovering it over the smeet with his gigantic hands, frowning slightly as he shook his head back and forth. "Oh my." He sighed. "...there IS psychic potential as I suspected, but look." He pointed at the device's screen as the Cardinal's eyes became deadened and solemn. "...he's fighting a losing battle with the PAK programming, just like-"

"Just like the last three we examined. We'll need to tone back the PAK programming. Have a "talk" with the Control Brains on making the standards more lax, or more and more of our consulars, more and more of our PEOPLE will end up like...well, ZIM!" Darth sighed as he gently waved his hand in the air. "I'll deal with it again."

Jourmungdr's face became saddened. "Must you? I can always call someone else in, you don't always have to be the one to do this. I of all people know the pain of losing family, my father...my brother...my sister..."

"I'll be FINE." Darth insisted darkly, Jourmungdr sighing as he left the room, slithering out and leaving the consular alone with the smeet. Darth raised one hand up to his right eye, the smeet watching in confusion as he gripped the eye with his clawed hands and began to UNSCREW it.

Squeeeaaaak...squeeeaaaak...squeeeeeeaaaak...

POP! Out it came. He opened up the back of it, depositing tiny little brightly-colored candies into his palm, offering a few to the surprised and VERY weirded-out smeet. "Candy, little guy?" He asked in his "special voice".

"Okeydokey!" The smeet said, popping them into his mouth and happily chewing as Darth put the eyeball back, waiting as the smeet swallowed down his candy, the little thing's movements slowly becoming sluggish as it laid back down on the bed, blinking, mouth opening and closing like a fish, wondering why it felt so tired that it couldn't move, but not tired enough to go to sleep...

"I'm sorry, little guy. But I needed you to ingest them. It's either that, or find a vein and you get a
shot, and the veins in your arms are too itsy-bitsy, teeny-weeny." The Cardinal of the consulars said tenderly, lifting the little guy up and holding him to his chest, stroking the smeet as he began the process.

The smeet tried to think about what was going on. Why had he been brought in here? What...what was...so...tired...head...swimmy...he couldn't remember who'd brought him in here...couldn't remember what color the candy had been-wait, what was candy? What was he? Why-

With that, the lifeless baby turned cold and still, its consciousness absorbed. Cardinal Darithil tenderly wrapping it within the blanket it had come in and putting it down as he pulled out something from his OTHER eye...an Exemplar Ring that bore the color of "Compassion".

With a deep sigh, he leveled it at the wrapped-up body on the bed. "Your mind is mine, little one. You haven't really died, you've just become a part of me. And I promise, I'll preserve you and honor you forever. I always do." He told the limp thing as his ring sparked.

In an instant, the body was gone, Darth holding his head in one hand as he rested against the wall, crouched down in shame as he felt a gentle set of paws climb atop him and nuzzle his cheek. Fiyvr looked up at him, speaking tenderly as he patted the Irken. "It means something that you keep requesting to do this. You're the only one who could be kind about it."

"I can't keep doing this." He insisted. "...they barely feel a thing...but I can't STOP feeling..."

"Don't you worry." Fiyvr told Dib as he paraded around the Earthling, a sweet smile on his mammalian features. He plopped himself before Dib, tilting his head ever-so-slightly to the side as he grinned. "We're here for you, Dib. We'll help you make this right. We'll save your world yet."

"It's rather hard for me to...take all of this...UGH..." Dib held his stomach and staggered away from the telescope, eyes bugging out, skin turning pale. "I think I'm gonna be sick."

Maht snapped his fingers, ring a-glow as a giant fanning leaf appeared, and he immediately began airing Dib off. "Thank you!" Dib said in appreciation. "You're GOOD at this, aren't you?"

"I used to have to carry one just like this around with me," Maht admitted. "That was BEFORE we made the Tallest our janitors. Which reminds me, it IS Red's birthday tomorrow, I really should buy him those nice gloves he wanted..."

"Compassion, my friend! It's all in knowing what people truly need. Sorrow for yourself fuels Chulainn over there." Fiyvr said, gesturing at the demon as he grunted, bladed tail slicing the skin off an alien fruit. "But sorrow for others has always been MY expertise. So let me cheer you up." Fiyvr whipped around, and was suddenly wearing a tiki-style dress, complete with grass skirt, a lei, and, well, a coconut bra. "Allow me to warm your cold heart with a hot island tune. Or maybe cool down your burning grief with a cool island-"

"He doesn't want a rendition of "Swimming with the Aki-Aki"!" Chulainn snarled, the temperature in the room spiking as blood dribbled out of his mouth and nostrils, the demon's sharp black eyes gaining pinprick white pupils, veins popping over his muscular body. "HE WANTS EVEN. Rage, vengeance, THAT is what he needs! After we leave, let's torch the planet! See how ZIM likes losing HIS home!"

Sarong stiffened, whipping his head back and forth as Lard Nar looked up from the chair he was sitting in, wearing a "Baby Bonder" as he helped his sister with her children. "What? What is it?"
"Something WONDERFUL is happening." Sarong whispered cheerily.

"DOWN, boy." Pyrsist hissed at Chulainn, flying up to Dib and resting on his shoulders. "I know of people's desires. He wants his Earth back. And I know how we can get it, because I know EXACTLY what the people who did that to the Earth want. They aren't looking for the Black Lantern, oh no."

Sude blinked. "Well, what ELSE could they be looking for?"

"The entity that goes with it." Pyrsist said calmly, an unmistakable smile spreading across her beak. "Did you honestly not think DEATH had an entity?"

"...well..." Sude scratched his head. "...I didn't think so, no. The Entities are embodiments of things that people need. Nobody NEEDS to die!"

"You WOULD think that...wouldn't you?" Chulainn spoke coldly. "But tell me, how did you feel when your world burned? Didn't you want to get EVEN?" The demon entity whispered, clenching his claws before Sude as the Seraphi frowned angrily.

"No, NO, I...I was ANGRY, but...NO!" He shook his head back and forth. "Revenge doesn't solve anything!"

Sarong immediately shivered on the Resisty's flagship. "YEECCCH. Something HORRIBLE was just suggested!"

"Oh I dunno about that, I'm thinking of some seriously whacked-up 12 Century German Needlework stuff to do to Zim for what he's done to my home..." Dib hissed coldly, clenching his fists tightly as he made for the door.

Sude's harmonious voice stopped him. "If you think it'll HELP, look at your sister, Dib. THAT'S a life filled with revenge after revenge. But it does as much for bringing peace to your spirit as drinking saltwater does for bringing nourishment to the body!"

Dib stopped, chewing his lip as he turned around. "Alright. What do you propose we do?"

"We need to stop them. Being the cautious guys they are, they're probably bringing the Wheel of Plagues with them. They're not some stupid cartoony masterminds, just leaving goons to guard it. They'll carry it with them as they go after the Black Entity." Sude explained calmly.

"I'm not sure, I know Xeil. She thinks this sort of thing through." Senior thought to himself. "She might think we'd EXPECT that and leave the Wheel somewhere safe..."

"Well where IS the Black Entity?"

"THAT...I think I can help you with." Michael White said calmly as he entered the room, holding up a map in the air and smirking broadly. "My honey bunches of oats and I were in this to get at Wiyn. And now she's in deep danger because of YOUR little friend in yellow, Senior." He growled at the communications officer. "Guess sometimes they slip through the cracks, huh?"

"I TRIED to help her." Senior mumbled back. "She kept listening, but she couldn't welcome them all in the way I did...so she tried to shut everyone and everything out..."
"Second place only counts in horseshoes. Point is, I'll TELL you where the Black Entity is. Show you, even. If you promise me that you, personally, will go save Knightly, oh "White Rose Ranger"."
He asked Senior, who folded his arms.

"I'd NEVER leave a lady in trouble. I'd be happy to do it, even if I have to scour the ends of the Earth." Senior insisted proudly, holding his fists in the air. "Be it a crazed demon, or a cute PUPPY GIRL, I will defeat ANYTHING that stands in the way of the preservation of life, justice and right-okay, you can stop playing that music now." He told Sude, the dragon turning the radio off as the "Power Rangers Theme Song" shut off. "Not right now, thanks. Though it IS catchy."

"I KNOW, right?" Sude laughed. "Go-Go-Power-Rangers!

"So, we repeat, where IS the Black Entity?" Dib asked as everyone crowded around a large table, White unfurling the map and pointing squarely at a point...at a house that was in Dib's town.

A very SPECIFIC house.

"OH-"

"YOU'VE-"

"GOTTA-"

"BE-"

"KIDDING ME!"

"YOUR PLACE?!?" Xeil yelled at Nny. "You mean to tell me that the Entity was within your infernal domicile this whole time and you never even KNEW IT?!"

"I guess the thing in the wall I've been sacrificing virgins and moose to really WAS something much more important." Nny mused to himself as they descended from Verminthrax, Nick looking up from the lawn chair he was sitting on. Xeil saw his cap was off and immediately let out a shriek.

"Put it back on! JEEZ!" She screamed. "It's like something from "Hannibal"!" She yelled, Nick blinking stupidly as he put the hat back over his head.

"You saw "Hannibal"?" Nny inquired, looking amused by Xeil's choice in movies.

"I'm quite the horror movie buff. I'm waiting for "The Rite" to come out. I would TOTALLY cross the species barrier for Anthony Hopkins." She then blushed slightly. "And a few other barriers for Bill the Cat..." She privately admitted.

"Uh...Johnny? Who're they?" Nick asked, looking stupidly at the enormous, alligator-esque dragon and the skeletally-clothed yellow Irken as a specter-like thing floated around him, examining him closely like a bug in a jar.

"I am VERMINTHRAX, Lord of the Dark Forest!" The Seraphi said calmly. "One of the last Seraphi and Master of Decomposition, Disease and Decay!"

"That's a lotta "d's"." Nick observed. "Say THAT three times fast!"
"No eating anybody, though." Panyck insisted. "You keep regurgitating their remains all over. It's DISGUSTING." He told the Seraphi.

"Yeah, and I'd know disgusting!" Spork's voice interjected, his face momentarily appearing above the entity's own. "You don't even wanna KNOW where I slept most of the nights I was in the Infinite Energy Absorbing Blob! Still." He turned his head back to Nick. "What of our "empty-headed" friend?"

"Yeah, what about the kid?" Xeil wondered.


"Human WHAT?!" Panyck screeched, immediately thinking back to Psyche as Nny began to explain what it was he wanted to do, Xeil calmly lifting Nick over her shoulder and bringing him with her inside as Verminthrax waited OUTSIDE, absentmindedly sending gypsy moths to land on every tree within half a mile.

"So, kid. Where is the 'thing in the walls' your legal guardian keeps talking about?"

"I THINK he's talking about the thing in the living room's closet." Nick remarked, pointing into the living room, as the smell hit Xeil and she immediately felt the bile rising.

"How long have they BEEN here?! Who WERE these people?!" She wondered out loud. "I'll just go in there last if that's where he skinned them..." She said, putting Nick down and resting against the wall, the smell becoming unbearable. "Maybe I should go lie down in another room."

"Better not go a-usin' the kitchen. That's where he tied them up and took their toes out..."

Xeil let out a liquidy "urgh".

"The ATTIC was where he made "finger puppets"..."

"URK..."

"He kept the hearts in the basement..."

"...ohhhhhh..."

"And made a harp out of their bones and muscle tendons in the bedroom-"

"Is there anyplace in this house where he WASN'T eviscerating his neighbors?!" Xeil managed to screech out.

"Oh yeah. The bathroom tub." Nick said.

"Phew." Xeil said, heading for the bathroom as Nick scratched the back of his neck.

"Yeah, that's where they all begged for their lives."

"OH GOD-BLEEERAAAAHAAAAHHHHH-"
Meanwhile...

The bathroom here brought back memories of his former life, Mortos thought. Of a time when he'd been an ordinary...

Well...been A human, even if he hadn't been ordinary in the slightest. There was a larger bathroom stall and set of smaller bathroom stalls, with Mortos deciding to do what he had always done and take of the larger bathrooms. There were precisely six stalls lined the left side of the wall, four sinks, a garbage can with a paper towel dispenser above it, and four urinals lined the right wall, graffiti written on all of the walls. Some were phone numbers, some were just lewd suggestions, one was a "Rate Prof. Membrane's Butt" piece...

"Hmm. 8.2. Not bad for a white guy." Mortos remarked as he walked along the floor. He didn't particularly like public bathrooms. Even though they all had the same general setup, some had been remodeled, while others still had the same look as they did when the president had been Reagan. And this? This was one of the older bathrooms. The light above didn't work well, flickering every so often, adding to the dilapidated look, and then again, there was the smell coming from each of the partially-open stall doors. He kept worrying that each was concealing some kind of monster, waiting to jump out at him. Luckily, there was nothing in any of the smaller stalls, much to Mortos's relief.

He moved past the next stall carefully, as to not run into a new danger as he reached the larger stall, going inside to do his business by a funny little piece on the walls that read "Tap twice to meet a Republican congressman" near the toilet. After finishing, he headed for the sink to wash his large hands, humming to himself. How silly he felt now. What had he been expecting? A trap? In a bathroom? He shook his head in spite of himself as he went to go get some paper towels.

A piercing scream echoed through the bathroom. He knew that scream, it was Zita. His heart was pounding out of his chest, as he raced for the door and fumbled with the handle. Why the heck wasn't it turning?! Mortos waited for a claw, some teeth, or other sharp instrument of pain to surge through his body before he could even get the stinkin' door open.

There came a loud, horrible ringing, like an air raid siren. He clasped his hands over his ears, growling angrily as the siren began to fade, the bathroom suddenly shifting...changing. Now he was in a college bathroom, complete with shower heads, larger stalls...a drain in the center of the showering area that had been opened up, the faint remnants of a white glove left behind...

This door wasn't working. But there WAS another door near the showers. So he slowly made his way through them, noticing the obvious change in the bathroom. Everything was now rusted over, decayed, bloody, and unsightly. Vorago. The mist of the Abyss of Hell made everything foul.

His head pounded and he thought that for a moment, his heart would just stop. Mortos forced his leg to step forward toward the door, past the mirrors on the wall, streaks of blood streaming down, a mocking message left behind.

"She kept screaming for you. You didn't come. Shame on you."

"...no." Mortos whispered.

Somehow he knew something terrible had happened to Zita. He should have made her stay with him, but he had a lapse in judgment. Now who knows what had happened to her.

A knock. A knock on a bathroom stall door. He nervously approached as an uneasy silence fell over
the bathroom and he gave a knock to the stall door.

**THUMPA-THUMP.**

He jumped back, his heart about to explode. Was someone in there?

"Zita?" He called out. "...Zita?"

He heard the door unlatch. Mortos steadied himself, suddenly realizing he had backed up towards the showers. It was a dead end. If something sinister wishing to do him harm came out of that stall, he wouldn't be able to escape. Still, he poised himself ready to make the monster's victory a costly one, burning fire rising from his claws as he tried to growl threateningly.

The door creaked open slightly, leaving the toilet still out of sight. Please don't let the overheadlight turn on, please don't let the light turn-

It did.

He SCREAMED.

Her head—bloody—eyes gouged out—hair tangled and bloody, matted to her forehead—mouth open in an eternal scream—sitting in the toilet bowl—staring back at him—gashes on her face—so much blood—splattered all over the stall—running out of the toilet.

Mortos ran out of the bathroom, stricken with horror, disgust, and anguish. He had left her alone and now, Zita was dead. Mortos fell on the floor outside of the bathroom, stomach wrenching, inducing vomiting onto the ground outside the college, hacking and heaving as he staggered up...

And then he saw it. His first piece of good news. From far, far down the block...was a giant, alligator-headed dragon. That was Verminthrax. He was HERE.

"I'm...going...to make...you...HURT." Mortos growled furiously, veins popping on his forehead, a furious greenish/black glint entering his eyes as he flew through the air, clenching his fists, howling like a maniac.

GIR, watching from far away, chuckled eagerly. He really wanted to join in...but he knew two ladies that were just DYING to meet him! As the boots in his feet activated he flew through the air, cackling madly. Didn't want to miss out on all the FUN, after all. "WEEEEEE!"

...having finally finished emptying all the contents of her stomach into the toilet, and with Nick tied to a nearby chair in the living room by some skins that Nny had tossed away, the Irken, her Entity and her "benefactor" began a chant to "call upon the thing in the wall", Nny waving a goat skull around as Xeil played a drum, Panyck and Spork speaking in tongues as Nick's mind concentrated only on singing the "Minty Mint" song in his head.
Well it was either that or look at the skinned Mrs. Jones next to him, so...whatcha gonna do, huh?

But it was at that moment that there came a surprised shout, a happy greeting, and then a double THWUMPA-THWOOOM which was followed up by the unmistakable sound of something very big and very heavy hitting the sidewalk. Growling angrily, Nny, the Entity of Fear and his Host raced outside.

Sure enough, Mortos was shaking hands with Dib, smiling at him as the assembled heroes took their stand, their Entities standing behind them with Dib at the forefront, Tak standing nearby with Jayd as Darth raised his silver staff in the air, white outfit fading as a new attire stretched out over him. His chest was now completely bare, save for his tattoo'd chest and sides. He wore the symbol for Compassion proudly on his chest and forehead, a purple belt holding a pair of white pants up with indigo bands around the bottom. "We're willing to give you a chance to surrender." He told Nny, Xeil, Spork and Panyck.

"Speak for yourself." Dite growled as she slammed her fist into her palm. "Blood like rain will pour from the darkening skies, as the avenging angel washes away-"

"Nobody is impressed by angst-filled poetry." Xeil said coldly as she clenched her fists and held them high, powerful-looking plasma cannons forming in her grip as she leveled them at the gang, Panyck rising in the air as Spork, now entirely yellow, his spirit manifesting as a construct, smirked at Miyuki.

"Do you plan to absorb me?" He inquired. "That's the only way to end it, and you know it."

"I hope it needn't come to that." Miyuki said calmly as Psyche fluttered behind her, the regal Irken forming a large and long rapier that she waved in the air.

"Hope, hope, hope. That's all you do. TALK about what you want, what you THINK will happen, what SHOULD happen. Because YOU are a creature of words. I AM A CREATURE OF ACTION!" Spork roared, leaping through the air, slicing at her with elongated PAK-legs as she danced away, Panyck firing off powerful blasts of golden/yellow energy from the mouth atop his forehead as Nny cackled insanely, beginning a danse macabre with Dib, Jayd, Tak and Darithil.

"Focus, focus..." Darth thought to himself as he dived to avoid a swing of a large scythe from a gigantic demon baby Nny had conjured up, it's stitched-together mouth somehow letting out a "goooo". Man oh man, you do NOT get creepier than that. "Channel the green. Search out and find Willpower-"

"PEOPLE LIKE YOU RUIN EVERYTHING!!!" Peech snarled at Xeil, tackling her from behind as the emotion of Avarice began to cloud Darth's mind, his eyes becoming orange, the aura of Avarice rising from him. "You're ruining this beautiful world! It's supposed to be MINE! All its jewels, all its treasures, MINE!"

"Now you're mine..." Nny chuckled, his baby construct holding Tak, Jayd and Dib down as he held a knife up and licked it eagerly, advancing...unaware Darth was standing right behind him, leveling a powerfully-glowing staff at him.

"You...are...hurting my friends...you won't take them from me. They're mine!" He roared out, an enormous orange handmade of burning flame grabbing Nny, his skin sizzling as Darth snarled with furious desire. "GIVE ME MY FRIENDS BACK!!!"
"Calm yourself, my Cardinal!" Feyr yelled out, launching an energy construct out as a giant hand slapped Darth in the back of the head. "We cannot let such emotions reign o'er us. Unless it's love..."

The consular leapt atop of Jourmungdr's head as the gigantic snake slid right into Nny like he was home plate, knocking him through the air and into a power line, a fine display of sparks shooting all over like fireworks as Feyr and Jourmungdr grinned proudly, punching the air. "FOR LOVE CONQUERS ALL WITH VIOLET LIGHT!"

"I'll be taking your Wheel of Plagues, now." Mortos growled, hog-tying Verminthrax to the ground with Tak's nanogenes as Jayd held his ring up the big jerk's nostril, Dib going to go tie Nny up.

"Heh...henh-henh-henh-henh-henh..." Verminthrax began chuckling darkly as Tak frowned down at him. He HATED that "Beavis and Butthead" esque laugh.

"What is so FUNNY, you reptilian reprobate?" She hissed.

"OY, we're warm-blooded!" Verminthrax immediately snapped. "And what's FUNNY is that you actually thought I'd be stupid enough to just carry the Wheel with me. We HID it in a place where NONE of you would be able to get at it. You're all so goody-goody...it takes someone with the Seed of True Evil to get inside..."

Elsewhere, Knightly and Gaz had managed to make their way through the amusement park and were now heading deeper and deeper into a large apartment complex that had manifested ominously before them, obscured text making it hard to tell just what the NAME of the company was.

One thing WAS for sure, though. THIS was where the Vorago was coming out from. Hundreds of air-conditioner-esque things were hanging out of the many windows, the mist seeping out into the world, cold, chilling, sickening to the soul. Walking up to the door, Knightly struggled to open it. Locked.

Gaz held up her ring. Chainsaw time!

Or at least, it WOULD have been, had not GIR launched himself squarely at them, with a cry of "LITTLE HI, LITTLE HO", spiraling around in the air like a pinwheel. Gaz and Knightly leapt to the side, GIR crashing through the door and into the lobby, jumping back up as he held up his hands, his ring sparkling as Gaz held up her construct chainsaw.

"Wanna have a good time, huh? I know what'll do the trick!" He laughed, clapping his hands as bursts of yellow flame formed into flying monkeys that flapped through the air around Knightly. "FLY, MY MONKEYS!"

"It was cute at FIRST." Gaz growled, launching herself at GIR, who was oblivious to her clear and obvious annoyance with him as he clapped his hands, a radio appearing nearby as a tango tune began to play. He twisted and lunged, dodging her chainsaw assault as he danced with a golden rose in his mouth, wearing a tuxedo his ring had formed for him as he sang like a Latin lover.

"I ache for the touch of your lips, dear!  But much more for the touch of your WHIPS, dear!  You can raise welts...like nobody else,  As we dance to the Masochism Tango!"
Gaz frowned and yanked her chainsaw out of the floor, rushing back at GIR as he leapt atop a nearby stairway, flipping over her and landing expertly, pointing upward and grinning triumphantly at her as Knightly was in the process of smacking a monkey.

*Let our love be a flame, not an ember!*
*Say it's ME that you'd like to dismember!*
*Blacken my eye, set fire to my tie,*
*As we dance to the Masochism Tango!*

"You're REALLY pissin' me off now!" Gaz snarled, belching out a wave of bloody flame from her mouth as it bathed over GIR, who barely managed to get a shield up in time as he launched himself through the air, hand plunging squarely into Gaz's chest and yanking something out with a squelchy "THLUNK", stepping back and smirking.

*At your command, before you here I stand!*
*Your heart is in my hand...*

He then realized what he'd actually done and let out a loud "YEEECH!", dropping it down and shaking his hand in the air, going "icky-icky-icky" as he bounced back and forth, Gaz calmly dusting herself off as she walked over to the heart, picking it back up.

"...wait. Why ain't cha dead?" GIR asked as she popped the heart back inside her chest.

"My ring IS my heart." She said calmly, giving him a harsh kick squarely to his nuts and bolts.

"Go put on your cleats, and come 'n trample me..." GIR mmumbled out, eyes bugging out as he staggered around, a large screw and several nuts dropping down with a CLUNKA-THINKA sound to the bloody, rusted-over floor. He heaved out harsh breaths over and over, looking up at Gaz as Knightly approached him from behind, Gaz from the front. "Why?" He asked.

"WHY?!" She snarled angrily. "You really ask me that? After the way you've been acting?!

"If you haven't got it, where IS it?!" Jayd snapped angrily. "Talk or I turn you into a handbag!"

"Henh-henh-henh. It's PROTECTED, my boy." Verminthrax hissed coldly. "I left behind a special surprise."

"Wait, HOW?!" Jayd inquired as Dib and Nny rolled by, punching and kicking each other as Spork launched waves of golden/amber energy at Miyuki, Dite, Peech and their entities joining in the fight to help their lady. "You're not within eyesight."

"My boy...you don't NEED to be within eyesight of your prey to manifest a construct with the Exemplar Ring." Tak said gently, in an instructional manner. "If you've got a strong enough imagination, or your SUBCONSCIOUS is strong enough, you could be, say, unknowingly creating a supervillain hundreds of lightyears away!" She told the medic.

"But...that stuff is FUNNY!" GIR insisted. "I'm GIR, Gazzy, it's me! I'm the one you LIKED, or at least, I...was..."

"I loved the funny little robot you WERE..." Gaz said, eyes narrowing as he raised her ring, leveling
it squarely at GIR's head. "Not the **freak** you've become."

The thing's clouded mind has focused. A buzzing that can't be ignored...a harsh vibration that warns her of danger. Now she sees the danger. All obstacles shall be...

*Removed*...

**THRUCKA-THROOOM!** Knightly, GIR and Gaz were launched through the air by a harsh blast of decayingly-glowing light the color of bile from the mouth of one VERY-psychotic-looking Wiyn as she chuckled darkly, bubbling vomit dribbling down her mouth as she tightly gripped the stairway, all of the apartment twisting and turning to her amusement. Her keen, cruel mind focused as Gaz, GIR and Knightly were deposited in the center of what had become an enormous volcano-esque pit, a long stairway lining the walls, leading up to her as she grinned coldly down at them, dark shapes rising up from the shadow she cast on the walls, a shadow born from the slowly-rising, brightly-glowing acidic magma below our "heroes".

"It's **good** to be back." Wiyn said calmly. "Go ahead...get them. No hurry, no hurry at all. They are not going anywhere..." She whispered, the disgusting THINGS rushing forward through the air, held up on bat-like wings, spider-like pincers snapping, claws held high.

"What in the flying **FUDGE**?" GIR yelled, spinning through the air as Knightly launched herself through the air on a rose-like whip, grabbing the stairway and climbing up to it with Gaz following behind. GIR leveled his hands at the oncoming monsters with Gaz, each of them firing off burning waves of energy at the strange things. "Lions?" He asked, a maned beast swiping at him with eight arms and an enormous fanged maw, a striped beast and a thick, furry brown monstrosity joining in, all disturbing half-breeds of winged things, mammals and insects.

"**Tigers?! BEARS?**" Gaz wondered out loud, punching out a Grizzly with a gauntlet-covered fist, Knightly reaching the stairway as a giant snake/alligator-like thing smirked down at her.

"Oh my."

"Just when I thought she was finally gone." Senior murmured angrily, slamming his gloved fist into his palm as he flew across the Earth with Sude, going side-by-side with the Resisty's flagship. "Thanks again for coming along with me!" He called out to Lard Nar.

"Hey, what are in-laws for?" Lard Nar laughed.

Meanwhile, Darth, Feyr and Jourmungdr were trying to contend with Xeil, Spork proving a harsher opponent than the others had previously thought, Nny breaking free and running after Nick as the kid tried to escape his legal guardian. Unfortunately for him, everyone runs faster with a knife...

"**THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME, THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME!**" Nick screamed, Nny cackling madly as he ran after him.

"**EWWW! He's trying to French-kiss me with his fangs!**" Peech yelled, yanking Spork off her as Dite kicked him squarely into Chulainn, who tried to crush him in a bear hug, Maht gently patting his shoulder, making him release the Tallest as Fiyvr leapt up and blew purplish dust in his face.

"Light's out, "**mein fuhrer"." Fiyvr quipped."

"You're no fun." Chulainn mumbled, dropping the unconscious Spork down as the others tried to
take on Xeil and Panyck, who seemed impossible to pin down. She kept weaving around in the air, launching bony weaponry at them as Panyck belched out burning waves of energy, the spectral mini-phantoms that hovered around him launching themselves out at Dib and Tak, Jayd holding up a shield to protect the Consulars and their patron entity.

KRUDDA-BOOOM! Verminthrax had gotten back up and with a harsh smack of his tail, everyone went flying except for Feyr, Jourmungdr and Darth. Deciding to deal with the Seraphi personally, the gigantic cobra launched itself at Verminthrax as Feyr and Darth hovered through the air, Darth rapidly spinning his staff around, deflecting the beams Xeil launched at him as Feyr clawed and sliced at Panyck, who returned the fisticuffs.

"I almost feel SORRY for you." Xeil said with a sneer on her masked face. "Your whole life, that's all people like you want, isn't it? To be LOVED. You really think a desire for LOVE is at the heart of Irkenkind?" Xeil laughed. "You should know by now that love is nothing more than a chemical reaction in the brain. It's a temporary state of mind. LOVE IS A LIE."

"Why don't I believe you?" Darth said with a firm, resolute look in his eyes.

"Naïve idealism." Xeil said, grappling with the Cardinal as they gazed into each other's eyes, spinning around above the street as the neighborhood, which HAD been keeping a safe distance, began to watch in awe, Prof. Membrane standing by President Man as they readied the army, "just in case". Well, President Man WOULD have readied the army, but he was in the middle of a hot make-out session with a woman in a "costume" with a large white t-shirt who was not wearing any pants.

Hey, affairs of state took precedence over affairs of state.

"No, you put on a cold front, but it's a false face you wear." Darth insisted calmly. "I may not be bonded to Love anymore, but I can sense MANY emotions, and I sense...that even YOU...have some love in your black heart!"

THRUCKA-KRAM! He slammed the staff into Xeil's stomach, a pulsing pink glow shooting out from her as her mask fell away, and she let out a scream, a pink, crystalline sheen covering her body as memories began to play out before her eyes...

"The constant battles with the Meekrobian people...we've been losing more and more invaders on the Outer Rim...the Resisty's rise in popularity through that "Reality TV" show...the Tallest think I'm paranoid, but I'm CERTAIN that there's something bigger going on. I can feel it..." Xeil tugged on her antennae, a nervous habit. "...if only they'd LISTEN. Sometimes I wanna tie them down and shove them in front of the console I sit at all day, SHOVE their faces into the truth. Make them LISTEN!..."

She sighed, holding her head in one hand, her voice becoming less erratic and high-pitched. "You...probably think I'm losing my mental faculties, sir. I know you said you were our safety net, but you have the right to call me whatever code word for crazy you'd like."

"I know what you mean. I believe you."

Eyes widening in surprise as she turned her head to look at him, one communications officer to another. "Wh-what?"

"You've got the gift. You hear BEYOND." He turned to gaze into her eyes, green into yellow. "When you're listening to the reports...when you're getting the communiqués from the front lines, the
requests from the military to the Tallest, the HUNDREDS of SOS signals...what's the first thing that
strikes your mind?"

"...there's just so...many..." She murmured, clutching her head, gritting her teeth. "I can't drown
them out. They won't stop COMING..."

"I know...I know." He put an arm around her shoulder, speaking gently. "Listen, you've got a real
zest and zeal for this job. You CARE. You fear for the Empire. That's a good thing." He smiled down
at her and nodded. "The static walls surround you, but we've found each other. And I think I know
something that'll help reach further into you. You hear beyond, the way I do...and I think you'll be
able to appreciate this stuff..."

He moved her over to his work station, quickly typing into a keypad on his desk, a drawer opening
up as he pulled out a green container filled with small disc-shaped capsules. "These are MPEG-3s,
MP3s. I think you're a "classical" and "soundtrack" type. I've got some good soundtracks from
famous operas and plays on Earth...I've been really getting into "Sweeney Todd" lately, it's grim and
gory, but GOOD. Give it a listen, come back, tell me what you think."

He put a gloved claw to his lip, smiling at her. "But let's let it be our little secret, alright?" He asked
gently.

She raised a claw to HER lips, zipping it "shut". "Yes, sir!" She said nervously, a blush forming on
her lips.

"STOOOOOOOP!!!" Xeil screamed, grabbing her head as Panyck stiffened, a harsh pain rippling
through him as his bonded Irken was assaulted by old memories. He was launched backward by a
harsh strike from Feyr as Jourmungdr managed to pin Verminthrax to the ground, seeing Xeil fall to
the ground, curling in a ball, babbling madly.

"Ca-can't do this, I'm sorry, can't-can't do this, I can't, I can't..."

"Xeil..." Darth said gently, approaching her from behind and gently stroking her head as the others
approached her.

"NOBODY MOVE!"

Everyone looked onto the roof. Dib was leveling his ring at Nny, who had a knife to Nick's throat,
the kid looking nervously at the others as Dib frowned darkly.

"Put...it...down." He growled out. "Leave him alone."

"You're not really in any position to argue with me." Nny said coldly.

Verminthrax began chuckling darkly. "Look at that. The show's about to REALLY start." He told
Jourmungdr, who hissed down at him. "Watch. This'll be good."

"I can't wait to see the look on your face through the spray of this kid's jugular." Nny crowed out.

"TRY THAT, AND WELL BLOW YOU UP!" Prof. Membrane yelled out, one colonel readying a
rocket launcher.

"Wow, my dad's actually gonna be HEROIC." Dib remarked, smiling slightly. "Guess there's a first
time for everything."

"Hey, everyone! I just got my period!" Relationship Sue yelled out cheerily, President Man wiping lipstick off his mouth, hoping his wife wouldn't notice the hickey.

"Try THAT, and my ring will send the rocket right back!" Nny proudly laughed, wiggling his hand with the black ring on it, fingers wobbling back and forth as Nick looked around at the others, seeing their obvious concern.

\textit{This is my fault. If I wasn't in danger, they wouldn't be so scared. And Mr. Nny's a BAD man.} Nick thought to himself.

A very crazy, stupid, INSANE idea.

\textbf{CHOMP!}

"YUM, \textbf{FINGER GOOD!}" Nick laughed out as he gobbled down Nny's ring finger, swallowing it as Nny gasped and reeled back, howling in pain as Dib raced forward, a single punch knocking him unconscious...

And in the next instant, everything went to hell. Instantly a dark shockwave of energy rippled out from Nick's body, the Southern kid howling like mad as black veins broke up through his skin, his clothes changing colors as sickening chills rose through everyone's spine. It felt like somebody was throwing up on their souls, all of them were forced back as the burning black waves launched out again and again, forcing them all to their knees. The sky above began to split with lightning, dark clouds of many shades of grey rolling in with the thunder, harsh flame rising up from Nick's shadow as he stood atop the roof, Dib raising his head up in horror at the sight before them.

"No..." whispered. "Oh no...it can't be...Nick, please tell me it's not you?" Dib whispered out, holding his hands to his mouth, eyes widening in horror.

"Heh. Stupid Johnny. He was just the BAIT. And now...we've caught the Big Fish." Verminthrax said as Nick began to chuckle darkly, looking out at Dib.

"\textbf{No, dib. no. nick's not here. there's just me. and it's so good to be back. how i've missed being back in the world.}" The Black Entity said cheerily. "\textit{and how i've missed my host. nick-nick-nick-na-nick-nick-nick-nick-nick...}"

A smile split his face, his face the work of demons. \textbf{"but then again, you're all just symptoms of the true disease. i'll get to the source soon enough. they're in atlanta, georgia right now...shouldn't take me more than a moment to tear through the schism and pay them a visit at the 'con..."}

"I won't let you hurt anyone. This ends here." Dib said, rising up in the air, clenching his fist as green light enveloped him. "I'll stop you."

"\textit{you...can...TRY.}" The Black Entity whispered.
Love's Labors Won

Gretchen held the ring up as it sparkled, tiny little embers of light dancing around it as she made her way through the dark mists of the world around her. She was confused...that Hawaiian town had been normal...

Why had it gone from sunny to darkness and shadows so quickly as she entered America? It didn’t make much sense. Then again, not much in the world WAS making sense right now. It was becoming increasingly hard to get a grip on what was real and what was not.

She really wanted to be back at her humble abode. She still hadn't finished up with the last touches on her shrine. She'd made a devoted little chapel in her closet, with a sculpture made of gum, leaves and little toys carefully sawed to form a perfect...well, as perfect as she could get...sculpture of her little Dibby's head. She had surrounded this touching sculpture to her beloved with her many stacks of poetry books. Hundreds upon hundreds of tiny booklets the size of novellas, all filled with her dedications to school and Dib and nature and Dib and love and Dib...

I hope you're all starting to see a pattern here. I really do.

At the moment, the power of the Sapphire Serpent was coursing through her, the unimaginable might that came from the emotion of Love filled her every pore as she heard the groaning cries of the things around her and held her ringed hand up, clenching it tightly as she focused. In an instant, she was pretty in pink, wearing an outfit made of different shades, with a helmet that allowed her ponytails to push out freely...and best of all, she DIDN’T look like some cheap slut!

If she was going to take ass and kick names, she wanted to look her best doing it. And she didn't want her chest exposed while this happened. Skoodge had gone a different route to track down Dib and Gaz and the others and let them know what had happened, and she was beginning to wish she'd gone with him. She supposed she'd have to be more careful then...

"Today, we're going to learn an important lesson, children." She announced as she spun rapidly around at an oncoming flurry of winged, mammalian-like monsters that were quickly knocked back by the pink tornado of lovely wrath. "How to take down your enemies in five minutes without breaking a nail!"

She ducked underneath an oncoming pterodactyl-esque beast, flying through the air after it, the thing letting out a pained screech as she grabbed its tail and then raced towards the ground, slamming it into the cold earth as she dusted herself off. A enormous, bulky beast lumbered at her, grunting and growling as it leapt up in the air, holding four thick arms high, pincers snapping.

But my, what rotten aim it had. Gretchen ducked down and did a harsh kick squarely in the stomach, making it reel back. Unfortunately, the thing had brought friends, a harsh, whistling cry echoing out from the mouth at the back of its head as it beat its chest, dozens more racing towards her, howling and snarling.

"Okay...deep breaths...remember your training." Gretchen insisted to herself as she held her fists up and readied herself, one rushing forward. "THAT'S MY PURSE! I DON'T KNOW YOU!" She yelled, her kick flying up and striking in the one place that no man wants to be hit in.

Well, uh...

...ohhh. Oh, GEEZ, that's...Jesus, man...
"This is really the best that you can do? I'm disappointed, Dib, I really am." Nick said softly, in a quiet, dangerous, horrible tone that made you think of squashed bugs and the smell of rotten things. The Black Entity was holding Dib high in the air, one fist held away, stained with Dib's blood and chunks of mask that he'd broken off with harsh punches. "I always thought so highly of you, you were the bestest protector of all the earth. I looked up to you so much."

"You're NOT him." Dib insisted as he slammed his knee into "Nick's" face, racing up into the sky as he and the Black Entity spiraled through the skies above Philadelphia, Dib whipping around and firing off rapid-fire blasts of green Willpower as the Black Entity dived around to avoid the assault.

A few moments later, the Black Entity had gripped Dib tightly, barreling into him as the two slarmed through a water tower, the water cascading down onto the town people as people scrambled for safety, the embodiment of Death gripping Dib tightly by the head as he coldly smirked. "Let's try this from the top, okay, pumpkin? Tell me when to stop. That way I'll know it's really bothering you."

With that, he YANKED Dib's jaw impossibly back, forcing his entire head in as Dib screeched and howled in pain, his body convulsing madly as the Black Entity took control, Dib's spirit suddenly aware he was in an enormous laboratory, with many scratching on an enormous chalkboard far to the right. "Nick" walked over to it, looking it over and chuckling slightly as he rubbed his chin, Dib glancing around the crystalline laboratory.

The place was definitely high-tech...the computers, the laboratory devices, the many enormous capsules with specimens lining up and down long walls with countless pictures of Dib in heroic poses, the roof showing childhood memories playing out like a movie...and yet, there was a sad kind of fragility to it all...

"It seems your heart is fragile." The Black Entity mused as he looked over the chalkboard. "...but it also seems you've got quite the artist's touch in you. Look at this...heh." He ran his hand over the chalkboard, over one person at a time. "Ah, your poor sister. How well we both know her, Dib. How we've cared for her. I more so than you can ever imagine. She kept visiting me in the hospital...always cheerful." He chuckled slightly. "I think that sometimes, we don't let the ones we care for see the worst sides of us. We know it would hurt them too much, even if it means being more honest. And Gaz was like that with me. She would have preferred being gentle to being honest after what happened to me."

"Shut...up..." Dib hissed. "You disgusting little f—k!"

"Such LANGUAGE! Your mother would be horrified." The Black Entity said, gesturing at the picture of his mom on the chalkboard, Peggy Membrane's face looking back at them with a calm face. "Your poor, saintly mother. I suppose "lab accident" is a easier way of thinking about it, instead of "personal weakness". You blamed yourself for not being good enough, I'd imagine, the same way your sister cast unfair blame..."
"I...said...shut...UP..." Dib growled darkly.

"and then there's zim. you know..." The Black Entity's voice was quiet...soft. "i thought...i really thought that, after he did what he'd done to ME...you know full well what hell his death would have spared this world. you looked into the Schism, you saw the other horrors he's brought about. i couldn't even WATCH what he did to you in that one...it was Sue Dibny all over again! should have killed him...should have killed him...but no." He turned around, shaking his head as he leveled his ring back at Dib. "his death is one of the many sane acts you've refused to commit. well...death will come to him, and to those who deserve it. and death will come to those who stand in my way."

THUDDA-BOOOOOOM! Dib was knocked back into consciousness, waking up in the wreckage of the Home Depot as "Nick" stood over him, coldly smirking down at him.

"come on, get up, this is the part where you try to keep fighting and i kick your ass."

"No. It's NOT that part." A voice rang out.

THUDDA-BRAKKA-THWUNK!

Four powerful, furious fists slammed into Nick, launching him through the air as Senior, Gaz, Gretchen and Knightly lowered their hands, standing proudly near Dib as Michael White and GIR helped him up, dusting the kid off.

"That's my girl." The two remarked as they smiled at their dearly beloved, smirking down at Dib. "Now then, kid...are you mother-f—kin' ready for the new s—t?" White asked.

"How the heck did you find me?" Dib inquired, scratching his head as the Black Entity removed itself from the nearby chainsaw rack.

...

...

...

...How indeed. The fight against Wiyn had not been going so well, at least, not at first, Knightly was trying to strangle a tiger-thing with its own tail, Gaz struggling to free herself from a snake-like scorpion hybrid as GIR, flying on his boots, whipped through the air, launching rays of burning yellow light at Wiyn as she spun through the air, laughing coldly at him.

"What's wrong? What happened to all your power? Is this really all you've got!"

"Just lemme level BOTH barrels of fun at you!" GIR yelled out, holding open his mouth as two powerful cannons popped out from within his maw, pulsing ray beams firing out at Wiyn as she held up her hand, a plasma shield erecting out her from the PAK she wore, a sneer covering her face.

"Well, don't you have spunk. I HATE spunk." She chuckled. "But tell me, GIR..." She growled as she launched herself through the air, pinning GIR to the wall as the acidic magma continued to slowly rise, smoke billowing up as Gaz and Knightly scrambled to reach the top. "What scares you?"

"Not YOU!" GIR roared out, forming PAK legs of his own as he kicked her away, the two spiraling up through the volcano as he launched wave after wave of burning Fear at her, eyes a-glow with fury. Wiyn just calmly smirked, effortlessly dodging them all, Gaz getting a worried expression on
her face at the sight of his struggling. Nothing he was doing seemed to be working well...

Wiyn got closer and closer to GIR every time he missed, finally getting close enough to grab his arm and heave him through the air, aiming a plasma cannon squarely at him and blasting his frail body over and over again, making him shudder as he tried to re-right himself in mid-air, slowing his fall before managing to thrust back up at her, jet-boots hissing. He was running low on fuel...and his ring was running low too...

"No, you're not afraid of me. You fear FAILING. Failing the people that depend on you. Failing your master. Failing your sweet little GAZZY. And you've failed so many times before."

"They're BOTH alive." GIR yelled back, clenching his fist as a scythe-like gauntlet formed on his hands, and he slashed at Wiyn, who calmly blocked his assaults with her wicked, curved knife blades.

"Of COURSE they are. Until you fail her again! Fail him again! AND YOU WILL!" She roared at him. "I represent the power of the TRUE reality with my superior superiority! I'M the only one who's gonna get what she wants tonight!"

Knightly and Gaz found the exit blocked by an enormous, pulsing grating made of twisted flesh and leveled their rings at it, only to find the Exemplar Rings could barely produce a spark. Gasping in surprise, they looked down at them, turning to each other. Oh, not NOW. Not NOW, of all times...

"Bing-bang-boom! We all go out together! Don't you just love a happy ending?" She laughed. "NOTHING can beat my might!"

"Not true." A voice rang out.

THWUCKA-BAM!

A silver/white, tipless-gloved fist slammed hard into the back of Wiyn's head as she was sent spiraling into the acid, Senior and Sude descending from the blown-open exit, Senior frowning down at the falling form of the evil Wiyn as he pointed defiantly at her. "My desire to protect life defeated you once." He said, carrying the others out of the volcano as they headed down to the bottom of its base with the Resisty, White happily engulfing Knightly in a deep hug, which was followed up by a deeper kiss.

It was all ov-

"ONCE. YOU BEAT ME ONCE. BUT I LEARNED FROM THAT MISTAKE, YOU INFERIOR TRASH!"

They all whipped their heads to the side at the volcano, Lard Nar frowning angrily as an ENORMOUS Wiyn emerged halfway. "Oh come FREAKIN' on, pack it in, you stupid b—tard!"

"You are at the bottom of the food chain, BOY!" Wiyn roared, leveling her hand down at them, her power glove bristling with energy as a burning-hot wave was launched their way. Sude spread his wings wide, letting out a strong, whistling roar as a pearly shield erected around them all, Senior pointing his rings at the others as he focused his power. "None of your friends can help!"

"They will." Senior said firmly, turning around as Sude's shield faded, the others rising into the air with him as he held his ring high. "The Power of Life contains elements of ALL the emotions. With Sude fueling me, I can fuel THEM."

"He's like a never-ending battery. This rocks." Gaz said, smirking proudly.
"And we are not going to lose...to a freakin' BUG!" Senior roared out, spiraling through the air as the others fired off at Wiyn, who swiped and swatted at them.

"Bugs tend to get SQUASHED." White added, holding HIS ring up as he sneered.

THWONK!

A gigantic 1000-ton weight in classic cartoon style fell atop of Wiyn as Knightly folded her arms, rolling her eyes but chuckling slightly. "Low quality finish there, snoogy-woogy-wips."

"Kiss my RING, bitsy-bookums." The albino Arosean chuckled.

CRAKKA-THROOOOOM! Wiyn burst out from the heavy construct, the pieces slamming into them all as GIR struggled to get one piece off, seeing Gaz knocked out nearby, Wiyn stepping free from the volcano, foot raised high. They were the size of a bug TO a bug.

"No." He whispered softly.

An eternal love is in peril. You are needed.

"LOVE CONQUERS ALL, B---H!" Gretchen roared out, slamming her full body squarely into Wiyn, twisting her head to the side and launching her away as her hoodie fell back...revealing that the Wheel of Plagues was actually deeply embedded in the back of her head. "Ah-HA. THAT'S where all this is coming from." Gretchen said, looking at the eye-covered wheel, a foul and malodorous stench rising from its decayed and decrepit fleshy form.

"GRETCHEN?!!" Gaz exclaimed, looking up at the pink-clothed classmate to find Skoodge helping her and GIR up as GIR went to awaken the others. "You've got...gee." She looked the outfit her classmate was wearing over. ".so...so much PINK. AAAAAAHHH!" She shielded her eyes, digging her fingers into them. "Can't...stand it!"

"Where'd you GET that ring?" Sude inquired, scooting over to Gretchen as the others crowded around her, amazed that someone who wielded the power of Love was actually wearing an outfit that DIDN'T show off a lot of skin.

"It's not like she deserved it." Wiyn's pitiless voice called out, the horrid beast rising as burning –hot flames rose from her body, black and foul like her heart. "She was just lucky. Right place, right time. Not like she EARNED it. And she won't escape. None of you will."

Wiyn rose up, her PAK legs dripping with filth, her skin too disgusting to fathom as unspeakable rancidness drooled out her mouth. Bloodshot eyes glared down at them as she launched herself through the air, foul ooze sloughing down from every orifice.

"Still think "all will be well"?" White whispered at Skoodge.

"...yeah..." Skoodge squeaked out. ".I might need to change my clothes, though..."

"YOU! ARE! MINE!"

... ...

...When she and I were first married, I remember so many asked us the same question.
"Why her?"

Well...she was the girl for me the moment I met her. Gaz will always have a special place for me in my heart, the same way that my "big sister" did...the same way my children always will...

But my "Flower" was so much different. She was honest. BRUTALLY honest. Curious as a cat. Intelligent. Weird. I LOVED weird.

And you'd never get the last word in. No, no. Not with my "Flower".

Though she might have been somebody's lab project...she was something more.

She was the perfect one for me. And so damn HUMAN. I loved that about her.

She and I...

We were going to make everyone love us.

And they did.

...oh they DID.

Zim had been showing Cass all around the town, looking at all the old favorite spots she'd enjoyed. And he had been talking a mile a minute about everything that had been going on as Two and Miyu walked alongside them, Azazel and Frequency following behind. Miyu was clutching the side of her helmet, a communiqué reaching her as she whistled sharply, Zim and Cass turning their heads.

"Announcement!" Miyu said in a horrified tone. "Zim, I bring...very bad news. The Black Entity has been found. And it DESPISES anything that takes advantage of the Base Planet of Earth...people like us. If you don't go and stop it..." She gestured at him. "Dib is fighting with all his might, but he cannot do it alone. You need to go now."

Zim nodded firmly and then kissed Cass lovingly on the lips. "You hold on. I'll be back." He promised, taking off through the air as Two held his mother's hand, smiling happily as he hugged her deeply, Cass watching Zim's form fade into the skyline as Miyu took off after him, apparently to help.

"We did it. We brought back the right Earth. We saved you." Two said softly, nuzzling his mother's cheek. "I was so worried, maneem..."

"Twoey-cutie." She spoke softly, caressing his head and smiling down at him. "Always so worried about me. I love you all so much, you really made my life something amazing. No matter what I went through, you guys all tried tah be there for me, that really means a lot, y'know?"

"We're never leaving your side again!" Two insisted, turning his head to the Beautiful Angel who nervously rubbed the back of his neck, wings tightly folded to his shoulders. "Isn't that RIGHT, Azzy?"

"I, well...Frequency, should we tell them?" He asked the bounty hunter, who sighed and held his four-digited paw over his face.

"Listen...cuz...I...balloon baby, I gotta tell you somethin' big..." Frequency told Cass, surprised at the sight of her raising a paw up, the green choker around her neck beginning to fade in color suddenly along with her clothes.
"I know." She said quietly. "...really, I know. Zerinim Two Jookiba, you listen to me." She told him, taking his hand. "I love you, but this isn't."

A pained gasp. She gripped her chest, letting out a grunt as she fell back onto the sandy ground, Two kneeling by her as his eyes widened in terror. "Maneem, what's wrong? We brought back your world. You're going to be fine. You HAVE to be fine."

"Two...I have lived an absolutely wonderful life. No matter what the ups and downs where, it was a WONDERFUL life with my children, and my husband...and my ohana." She said, chuckling slightly. "Lilo...Stitch...I'm sorry I didn't get to see you again. I'll never be able to thank you for everything you did for me..."

"Please, don't give up." Two whispered, shaking his head back and forth as Azazel nervously, his voice so quiet, spoke up.

"Two...there's...there's no one else in the town...there's no pollution or contaminants in the ground. I don't think this place is really her world so much as just a copy of it. And even if...I'm not sure it's enough to bring her back..."

"It's not that, Azzy." Cass said softly. "...we raised you well. Page did a good job with you. I wish I could thank him for that. And thank Grey. Oh, Grey..." A tear sprung to her eye. "He'll never forgive me for leaving him like this. That...K..K-Ann...Jookiba...will...will always...be... will always be his friend..."

"Please, PLEASE, don't do this. Don't give up!" Two begged.

"I'm not giving up. I'm thankful for all the extra years I had."

"We'll have more, SO much more!" Two insisted, the tears dribbling down his cheeks, burning a trail through as he clung tightly to her, Azazel kneeling near her, eyes wide and sorrowful. "I couldn't save our planet, but we can save you! We were supposed to save you, that's what ALL of this was for, that's what we risked EVERYTHING for!...we have to save you. It's not going to end like this. It CAN'T."

"All your powers, and you still don't realize..." His mother whispered, her body slowly becoming black and white and grey. She was little more than a sketching on a paper pad now...

"It's not gonna end like this...please, please. It can't end like this..." Frequency thought softly. "Not to her, not like this..."

"I know what you're thinkin'." She said, looking back at him, smiling slightly. "But I think you understand...don't you?"

"..."

"Two...Azzy...tell Miyu...tell Zim...tell them all this. It's...it's not...going..." She managed to whisper out before her eyes began to slowly close, the last of the amber light fading from them.

"Not going to what?...what?! Mom, please tell me it's not going to end this way, be STRONG, be...be..." Two whispered.

And with that...she was still. Never to move again.

"...no." Azazel murmured, covering his face.
"...m...m-muh...muh..." Two whispered.

The cry rang through the air. Zim stiffened as he ran down the street towards where Dib was. Miyu halted in midair, a sudden choking sensation rising in her. Senior and Sude gasped...

In an instant, Sude wrapped his rainbow wings around his host. "Hold on." He whispered, whisking him away as the others were left to deal with Wiyn on their own, Senior racing towards the limp form that was being cradled...

Miyu was there...holding her mother's body. Her helmet had been utterly discarded, the visor thrown away, revealing her true body, a disturbing brain that seemed half organic and half computer alit atop her cranial cavity. Two tiny, stubby antennae poked up from the top of her head, an empty slot filled with compound eyes that were made to focus through a visor for the bonus of seeing beyond were now almost utterly blind...

And yet still gazing down at her beloved auntie's corpse...

Crying for what might have been the first time in her life, her voice slightly buzzy, her metallic tone infected with deep sorrow.

"...she's gone." Miyuki, the Suit of Chalices of the Major Arcana, whispered. "...she's gone..."

"You...you mean the lil' Flower's dead?" Senior whispered, his voice now becoming childlike and sad, a mournful expression flickering over his face. "...oh, no. I'm...I'm sorry..." He said gently. "I truly am."

"You...YOU!" Miyu snarled furiously, putting her mother down and turning on him. "You did this..."

"Miyu, please, he would never-" Sude insisted.

Too late. Miyu was rushing forward, her rapier held high as her ring sparked with orange energy, the tears flowing freely as thousands of blades rushed through the air alongside her, eager to cut and cut and cut.

"THIS IS YOUR FAULT!!!

...

...

...

... "GAAAAAH!"

Skoodge carried Gretchen in his arms, the fat lil' lump running for his life as Wiyn belched out scorching beams of light from her mouth, snarling with each blast. Unfortunately for Skoodge and Gretchen, most of the others were knocked unconscious, they'd been unable to withstand Wiyn's assault...

And it looked like Gretchen and Skoodge were soon to follow.

"I can't believe you're not trying to turn around and fight!" Gretchen found herself yelling as she was bounced up and down in Skoodge's pudgy arms, waving her arms in the air. "Aren't you an Irken Invader? What kind of Irken Invader doesn't want to fight?"
"The cute fat kind that can't get up when he falls down and who gets cramps when he's under stress!" Skoodge sobbed out.

Wiyn cackled as she continued to stomp after them. "I SEE YOU! ZAP!" She growled out, firing off FINGER-BEAMS at them, lasers splitting the ground around them. "STAND STILL AND JUST BE KILLED BY ME! ZAP!"

"We need help." Skoodge insisted as they hid behind an enormous rock, panting heavily as Gretchen angrily glanced over at White and Knightly, who were all "lovey-dovey" and in such a cheery, "I wub you" place that they had actually become chibis. The two weren't bigger than your arm. You could literally hold them in the palm of your hand.

"I think I know what we need." Gretchen said, a grin stretching across her face.

"Please don't say "love". Love is NOT going to help right now. I really hope you have another idea."

"My dear boy, Skoodge!" Gretchen said, squeezing his cheeks and smiling. "Don't you know? Love is beautiful. Love is inspiring. And love...is...LETHAL." She growled, whipping out from behind the rock with one arm swiping forward, a spike-like tether shooting into Wiyn's eye with a satisfying, wet, MEATY sound. Wiyn howled as she held the tether, trying to yank it out, but every movement it made caused her even greater agony.

"That won't hold her there FOREVER." Skoodge insisted. "But you look like you've got a plan." He admitted admiringly, seeing Gretchen's resolute face.

"Yes...we do need help...we need a weapon..." Gretchen insisted to him. "We need..."

She reached over to the small White and Knightly, quickly tying their hair together.

"CHIBI-CHUCKS!"

"What in the-?!?" Skoodge exclaimed, eyes widening as Gretchen stuck the other end of the tether into the ground, racing up to the stupefied, unable-to-believe-her-eyes...

...okay, eye. Unable to believe her EYE Wiyn...

And went...to...TOWN!

Woah, Black Betty, bam-a-lam!
Woah, Black Betty, bam-a-lam!

"Are you seeing what I'M seeing?!" Gaz asked GIR as they woke up with the others, all of them looking on at this ridiculous scenario.

"...I see it. But I don't believe it!" GIR exclaimed. "My flabber is officially GASTED."

"YOU! TALK! TOO! MUCH! ABOUT! YOURSELF! I! HATE! THAT!" Gretchen roared out, whacking Wiyn in the face with each word before doing a quick backflip kick that knocked Wiyn back, letting out a karate yell as she rushed forward, a swift double kick cracking Wiyn's ankle.

Woah, Black Betty, bam-a-lam!
Woah, Black Betty, bam-a-lam!
Black Betty had a child, bam-a-lam,
"The PAAAAAIN!" White yelled out. He was taking the worst beating. "If you weren't a girl and saving our lives, I'd kick your ass!" He managed to get out in between being forcibly struck against Wiyn's kneecaps.

"Hey, she's holding me in VERY uncomfortable and litigious places!" Knightly snapped back at him. "It's not like it's "above the neck" for ME!"

"Well I can't feel ANYTHING above my neck, so BOO-HOO for you, Snooky-Poo!" White sobbed as Gretchen began bashing Wiyn's back in.

"Love...conquers...ALL!" Gretchen roared out, tossing the "chibi-chucks" away as she lifted a glowing pink fist up, rising through the air and then slamming her elbow down squarely on Wiyn's head.

THWUNKA-THWA-CHOOOOOM! She went straight into the Earth, falling doooown, doooooown, doooooooooown. Gretchen and the others put their ears, or in GIR'S case, his lack of ears, to the hole.

"......wow. That's one deep hole." Gaz remarked as they finally stepped back. "I think she's probably somewhere in China now. And I think we need to find my brother. As in, YESTERDAY."

PRESENT...

"That's how we got here." Gretchen finished, smiling sweetly at Dib and helping him up as she kissed his gloved hand, Dib blushing visibly as Nick frowned, folding his arms.

"oh. you. great. just great." He mumbled, looking at the newcomers before turning to Gaz, a cold, cruel smirk rising on his features. "hello, gazzy." He cooed. "you look mad that i've been beating your brother's face in."

Gaz clenched her fists tightly.

"you're beautiful when you're angry." Nick chuckled. "you must wanna kill me. but you know...i'm the only one who's going to get what he wants tonight."

Even though everyone knew he had been about to say something evil and then attack, even though all of them were moving as fast as they could, it felt like trying to swim through jello. With almost impossible speed and ridiculous ease, he launched several cars in their direction, knocking them away as he rushed forth at Gaz, pinning her to the ground and smiling sweetly.

"you know, gazzy, the only real crime here is that you and i never got the chance to go on a-"

CRUCHA-THRUCK!

"...was that supposed to hurt?" Nick asked, Gaz gaping at her heavy, booted foot and slowly lowering it back down as Nick smirked. "i don't have a physical body, not really. i don't have a soul. i'm pure ideal, gazzy."

THWACK! He knocked her through the air, looking around. "where is he...where's z-ahhhhh."

He turned his head, seeing Zim standing there, an angry, furious glare in maroon/ruby eyes as Zim clenched his fists tightly.
"Nobody...hurts the Dib...but ME. Nobody...hurts my GIR...hurts my Skoodge...and NOBODY...treats GAZ! LIKE! **THAT!**" Zim snarled furiously, clawing Nick across the face, an orange aura of power rising around him as they barreled down the street, all of Philadelphia shaking as the thousands of Earths in the sky began to sparkle and glow, an enormous Schism opening up overhead.

"**you've got some nerve playing the "don't hurt the innocent" card when you're the worst of them all. even TAK has more integrity then-**"

Zim spat in his face. It dribbled down his chin, The Black Entity's pupils becoming tiny, furious dots as a vein popped up on his forehead.

"**that...was...a...mistake.**" he whispered coldly.

With a powerful thrust he launched Zim back, then punched him through the air. Zim collided with several apartment buildings, crashing into an enormous pile of debris as Darithil rushed forward, his claws outstretched, eyes glaring over at Nick.

"I am LOATHE to do this, but you give me no choice!" He roared, grabbing Nick's head in his clawed hands as he tightened his grip, a purplish shimmer surrounding the child's form as the youth's body pulsed with multicolored lightning. "I'm sorry that you've forgotten what right and wrong are...it has always saddened me to bring an end to young life...but if you intend to keep doing what you are doing...I must break you. This is the closest I can come to compassion for one like you."

"**AHHH!**" The Black Entity howled. "**the magic! it hurts! it HUUUUURTS!**" He grabbed his head, whimpering and crying and-

Breaking...into...a grin.

"**actually, it TICKLES.**" Nick sniggered.

"Ohhhhh dear." Darth mumbled, Nick thrusting his fist forward.

KRAKKA-KOW!

"**LITTLE HELP HEEERE!**" Darth yelled, flying through the air, Fiyvr racing after him as Dib yelled out at Nick.

<u>"Stop it, Nick!"</u> He spread his arms wide at the people that were hiding from the terrible struggle, many badly injured...some fishing out the dead. The smell of rotting flesh, fresh blood and broken homes was filling the air. "Don't you remember when we first started? THIS is why we put on the uniform! THIS is why we do we what do! It's not just for attention, for recognition, it's because no matter HOW stupid they are...they DESERVE to be protected, they NEED to be protected! Don't you remember that?"

"**i DO remember that, dib.**" The Black Entity said softly.

"Then stop the "temper tantrum"!"

"**i'm not a BABY, dib. but i'm not finished. i want you out of the way for what i've got planned. i admit...**" He raised his hands up, sighing and turning his back to Dib. "**i was...getting out of control. drunk on the fun of being back. but i remember why i'm here, dib. i remember it all. i'll come quietly...after...i've dealt with the people who ruined all your lives.**"
"...what?" Dib asked, scratching his head as Nick turned towards the Schism, then turned back to him. Suddenly Dib realized what the Black Entity had planned and held his hands up. "Hey, wait, DON' T-"

"atlanta, georgia...here...i...COME." The Black Entity roared triumphantly, flying through the Schism as Dib and the others chased after him.

... ... ...

...meanwhile, Miyu was going postal on Senior as he desperately blocked over and over with his gauntleted gloves, the others watching on as Sude tried to calm her down.

"Miyu, please, this isn't helping..."

"ANNOUNCEMENT: IT WILL MAKE ME FEEL A WHOLE!

CLANG!

"LOT!"

CLANG!

"BETTEEEEEERRR!"

KRAKKA-CLANG! This time Senior was knocked down, and Miyu kicked him through the air, panting and heaving as she continued crying, racing at him with her rapier to slice him in two. He landed on the ground, rolling to the side and leaping back up, narrowly avoiding another slice as he was forced back further and further towards the ocean, the others racing after them.

"I don't want to hurt you! I don't want to fight you!" Senior insisted, his ring glowing as he held aloft a white rose, the tendrils growing thick and powerful. Within moments, a great stem had become a handle, rose petals rising up to form a flower-esque blade. He blocked her assault with the pearly weapon, spinning quickly, knocking her back. "Look at what you're doing, you've lost all control! Just take a deep breath-

"This is YOUR fault!" Miyu yelled angrily. "ALL YOUR FAULT!"

She grabbed ahold of sand, throwing it at his face, but he spun the blade rapidly, the sword moving so fast it transformed the glass into shining sparkles of glass that fell to the earth. Miyu raised her sword over her head, rushing forward...

But Senior had had quite enough by now. He held the rose up as it engulfed the hand that held it in thorny vines, transforming before their eyes into a buster cannon that fired out a twisted cat's cradle-esque assortment of flowery vines. It pinned Miyu to the ground, knocking the wind out of her techno-organic body, her rapier flying away as Sude put a claw to her throat.

"Now stop this." He said softly, tenderly, a gentle feeling of ease seeping into Miyu from his majestic touch. "...and tell the truth. Why do you feel this is "his fault"?"

"I'll TELL you how! I've never been anything BUT truthful when it was asked of me!" Two's voice snarled out as he stomped over to Senior, poking his chest. "And the TRUTH is that YOUR Prof.
Membrane was so inept he got his wife killed! YOUR Gaz was so selfish that she ignored her brother's pain for years! YOUR Zim lobotomized a child! YOUR Dib never stopped Zim when he had the chance! And when the world most needed somebody like him..."

Senior bit his lip. He knew what was coming next.

"YOU ran away! You could have stopped ALL of this before it started! You SHOULD have!" Two screamed, tears brimming in his eyes. "You could have led them all into a brighter tomorrow! You should have led them into a brighter tomorrow! But instead, when IZ-Prime needed one of it's most noble heroes, he ran away and dropped the ball at the one time when it most mattered!"

"You should have gone to Earth to stop the Black Entity! I know that there was a chance she wouldn't have lived!" Miyu insisted. "But we could have brought her back if the Black Entity hadn't been found! Now it'll go off and end any chance we have of reviving our world! It'll tear "them" apart because you didn't nip things in the bud!"

Senior stood there, quietly listening, one elbow resting on his hand, one hand resting over his mouth, antennae flattened against his head. He was utterly, utterly silent, simply listening...hearing everything they had to say and not judging. Frequency heard a "ping" inside his head, touching the little dot in the center of his forehead as he momentarily turned away, eyes widening.

"You ruined our chance to make this place into the perfect world that Realm B-S was! THAT'S why we did what we did! THAT'S why our "Flower"...wilted..." Miyu trailed off, weeping as her head hit the beach, turning away in shame.

"It wasn't just about Mom...we did this to bring back our perfect world." Azazel admitted. "...even though it was a long shot either way..."

"So you did this to...sigh." Senior covered his face with one hand, his voice sympathetic, as gentle and kindly as it had ever been. "...I am so...so...sorry." He murmured. "...truly...I am. But...but I need to ask something. Am...am I...WAS I...in your world?"

"Yes." Miyu said. "We were hoping you'd be the great hero and dear friend you were to our family...and instead you-"

"Miyu...Two...Azzy...Free..." Senior spoke up. "Listen. This little bit of land is from your world. But if this is your world...then it CAN'T be perfect. Because a perfect world wouldn't need someone like me."

With that, Azzy covered his face in one hand, Frequency sighing as Miyu snapped her head back at him, Two's mouth hanging open as he mumbled. "B-but it's...it's the perfect...it's...I..."

His knees hit the beach as he slowly shook his head back and forth. "Oh my GOD, it's...it's not mine, it never...how? Why didn't I...?"

"...I thought we survived...to bring back our world. To make I-Z a better place." Miyu murmured as Sude gently lifted her up. "And I thought...the people here couldn't do that. But you...you're the real deal, aren't you?" She asked. "...you really ARE him. Just the sort of person we'd hoped you'd be. If this place can make someone like you, maybe...maybe this world's good enough. Maybe we don't need perfection."

"You picked the wrong lifestyle to condemn. And the wrong one to condone." Azazel murmured.

"Well. I think we've all REALLY learned some valuable life lessons." Frequency said cheerily,
placing his paws together and smiling in approval as he sagely nodded, his gaze like the Buddha's blessing. "But UNFORTUNATELY cuzzies, uh...I gots some bad news. My main wo-man Miyuki just called me up. Mr. "Southern-Style" Black Entity just zoomed through the biggest Schism yet...and he's on his way to Atlanta, Georgia."

"What's there? The world's biggest ball of yarn or somethin'? Why'd he go there?" Two inquired.

Sude's eyes widened. "Oh no..."

"Ohhhh yeaahh." Frequency murmured. "...it ain't OUR Atlanta, Georgia, dudes..."

... ... ...

...with a powerful punch that was almost cartoonish in strength a red-haired man was knocked straight through the hotel's first floor set of double doors, crashing into a desk and panting and heaving, trying to stand up as a black-clothed being hovered in, the thousands of assembled fans gaping in horror at the sight before them, one young woman in a shower cap, goggles and with germ-killing spray murmuring in surprise and confusion.

It couldn't be. But...but she'd SEEN that face so many times before online.

It couldn't be.

"pleased to meet you. won'tcha guess my name?"

"...Nick?" She asked quietly.

"don't look so surprised." The Black Entity growled. "you brought this on yourself." he hissed, clenching his fist and slamming it into his palm. "YOU ALL DID."
I grew up in a different universe. Another plane of existence. And I grew up learning about life from ANOTHER universe. And I'd like to think it made me a better person.

But I gave it all up. I had everything. Everything I wanted, all right in front of me. And I gave it away in the name of doing what was right. I had thought that when it was over, I could come back. And everything...was going to be perfect.

But I learned something else. I learned...that the world I lived in...didn't work that way. I learned that in this universe, right and wrong were ignored for the most shallow, petty reasons. I learned that my life's work...

Was all fiction.

Well...I didn't take this too well at first, realizing I had no chance...no choice...I lost all hope. But then I was reminded of the reason why I'd started doing this in the first place. And I realized something important. The realm of I-Z had shoved right and wrong under the rug. It had stripped people of their dreams and robbed them of their hope.

But when you can't find hope...you BECOME it. And I'm gonna be that hope. I'll stay true to what I learned and believed in. I will never give up.

But unfortunately, that might not matter, because my "human self" has lost his s—t. He didn't take the revelation as well as I did. I think this might be a cry for help. Suicide by cop. I think...he wants to die. Because he can't see why he should keep living.

But before he DOES die...well...

He intends to take the people who ruined his life with him.

Atlanta, Georgia. Earth Prime. A world where things like superheroes and aliens and such aren't truly believed in. Most are found only in movies. In comics. In games.

In CARTOONS. And it was one such cartoon that had drawn thousands upon thousands to "InvaderCON", to celebrate the immense cult classic "Invader Zim". But the festivities were kind of put on the backburner because a psychopathic, trucker-hat-wearing black-clothed lunatic with a dark ring on his finger was launching people through the air, juggling cars and smashing merchandise left and-

KRUCHA-KRAAAAASSSH!

Well, there went the gigantic statue of GIR. The HUMANITY!

"What the hell!?!" Steve Russel exclaimed, tugging at his hair, eyes bugging out as Jhonen staggered out of the crack in the wall he'd been shoved in, holding his head and moaning.
"like i said! you only have yourself to blame!" The Black Entity roared out angrily, grabbing ahold of the desk Jhonen had slammed into and tossing it through the air. It sailed over a goggle-wearing young woman who shrieked and pulled her shower cap over her head as she and her friends ran for the ladies bathroom to hide.

"Cool it down, Grumpy Clown!" GIR cheerily called out, ripping himself free from the Schism and descending from the sky with the others as Zim and Dib headed inside of the convention hall. Dib immediately ran over to a stunned-looking middle-aged man, notepad in hand as Zim examined the nearby wall, looking at various fan works of...well, him.

"Verrry good likeness if I do say so myself. Except this one. Why does Zim have eyelashes!?" He mumbled as Gaz tried to hold the Black Entity down, GIR getting ready to cut open his head. Y'know. Again.

"Oh my God, he's REAL!" Jhonen Vasquez exclaimed. "Eric, run for your life!" He yelled at Mr. Trueheart after he'd finished signing his own autographs.

"what're you all SCREAMING about?!" The Black Entity yelled, tossing GIR and Gaz through the air as they landed in the middle of a stand devoted entirely to the shipping section, hand puppets of Zim and Dib falling onto their heads, then slipping off to land together in an awkward and sexually-suggestive position. "you KNEW this day would come!"

"Scuse me, are you really an alien? And...are you into, like, bondage?" One human asked Feyr as Peech posed with several fanboys, one hand sneaking a wallet out of their back pockets as Pyrsist chuckled.

"Yes...and no, not bondage." Feyr shook his head. "Actually I'm into Vorarephilia."

"REALLY? Me too!" The fanboy said, pulling his fake Zim contacts out of his eyes, grinning broadly. "Can you...y'know...actually?"

"It's very useful in my job. I can either shrink them or unhinge my jaw like this, being spiritually bonded to a giant cobra has its benefits..." Feyr remarked as he cracked his jaw back, the Black Entity clapping his hands together as oozing, pus-like black beings rose from his shadow, rushing at our heroes.

Gaz struggled to contend with a giant ball of flesh made up of thousands of faces, tentacles shooting out to ensnare her as she went to town with her chainsaw, a furious roar emitting from her mouth as Chulainn and Dite joined in. Xeil and Panyck were in the middle of avoiding being eviscerated by a giant, butcher-knife-wielding maniac that looked like the unholy spawn of Leatherface and Eminem, with a large baby's face as a mask. Darth was pinned against the wall by a shrieking, winged thing with a mouth on its stomach, Maht trying to pull it away as Dib and Tak struggled to protect several dozen fans of Invader Zim from a rampaging three-headed dog.

"He is one very sick, and VERY effective puppy with this ring. I swear, these things actually SMELL bad too!" Jayd yelled out as he wrestled a gigantic two-headed snake/crab mixed breed to the ground, forcing it to spit out Mr. Russel, who scrambled to hide in the women's bathroom. Everyone was too busy running around and shouting like madmen to care.

"Yes, it would be fascinating if it wasn't so DISGUSTING!" Miyuki yelled out, lassoing a demonic bull with elongated arms as Spork prepared to castrate it with the "Bob Barker" maneuver,
Jourmungdr tapping Feyr on the shoulder.

"Now is not the time to be snacking."

"Oh, oh-kay. We gunnuh haffa oo dis latuh." Feyr mumbled out, mouth half-full of fanboy, spitting him out. He then leapt over his patron's head, striking down an undead crow-like construct, Peetch and Pyrsist firing off orange blasts of light at a scarecrow with a face mask made of flesh. Peetch smacked the head of it off as it stumbled around, Peetch growling angrily.

"It's not hard to knock 'em down, but getting them to STAY down is SOOOOO annoying!"

"Give it up, Nick!" Dib yelled out as he and Jayd and the Black Entity launched burning beams of black and green, Tak hovering overhead. "Our combined Willpower is JUST as strong as yours! You can't do this on your own!"

"The Green Line is gonna stop you COLD." Jayd said proudly.

"cold? you don't know cold. cold is having your head scooped open like an ice cream carton for trying to help your friend. cold is injustice levied on the just. cold is what life made me."

"but you're right. i don't have enough strength on my own to really wipe you out of my way the way i want. luckily...i'm not the only thing that's attracted to this place like a moth to flame."

"...don't...tell...me..." Dib murmured.

"OH COME OONONNNN!!!" Zim screamed as THEY began to pour out of the Schism. "ZIM DOES NOT HAVE BREASTS!"

There were hundreds, THOUSANDS of Zims, Dibs, Gazes, GIRs, all pouring out of the Schism and into the streets, sweeping towards the hotel as Senior whistled, getting his charge's attention as Sude held up a protective shield to keep the oncoming hordes back. "Everybody, listen up! Damage control! Get the civilians out of here, the first priority is to protect the innocent!"

"there ARE no innocents in this frickin' Marriot!!!" The Black Entity roared out, grabing ahold of the girl in the shower cap from before and Jhonen...one a fan, the other a creator.

"Put them down." Sude growled, Senior getting an idea as he raced into the Schism with his ring shining brightly. Oh please oh please, let it work, he thought.

"It's about time somebody showed them what they were really doing!" The Black Entity hissed, his voice suddenly becming more focused...more human-like...and yet somehow, more terrible. 

"These aren't just STORIES you're making up!" He snapped, glaring into their eyes. 

"Somewhere out there, they're ALL happening! And now THIS story's happening to YOU!"

"I...er...that is..." The girl began to stutter. 

"SHUT UP!" The Black Entity snarled. "People like you...all you do is think of ways to exploit people like me. You think it's all just fun and games, don't you? You don't care what happens
"Is that REALLY all you're about? Rage?" Jayd asked as he tackled The Black Entity to the ground, punching him again and again as the others tried to hold the oncoming horde of "Evil I-Z Residents" back. Sude straining to keep the protective shield around the hotel residents. "All you're doing is just proving to people like them that people like you don't DESERVE to have your feelings thought about!"

The Black Entity punched him away, Jayd being knocked clear up through the roof as the Black Entity followed after, striking him again and again as he lay on the roof, Tak struggling to pull him away from Jayd...all futilely. Jayd struggled to stay awake, but the Green Lantern couldn't keep his consciousness forever...

Luckily, he didn't have to. An enormous pulsing blast of burning green power launched into the Black Entity from the side, and he looked up to see Zerinim Two Jookiba glaring balefully down at him.

"You." He hissed. "You laid hands on them...our Originators...how...DARE you!"

His mouth opened wide, bloody flame sloughing out to drench the Black Entity and force him to the roof as Azazel carried Jayd back, Miyu leaping forward, an Orange and Yellow rapier made of construct energy slicing an "M" into the Black Entity's chest as she promptly KICKED him off the roof, a smirk spreading across her features. Evidently she'd kept some of her dad's exuberance along with her mother's ruthless fighting style.

"Promise: you will NOT be alone in this skirmish." Miyu told Jayd as she and Two readied themselves and leapt down, the Black Entity angrily pulling himself out of a crater as the dozens of evil counterparts of the many I-Z parallel universes stood by his side. He was struck in the middle of the head with a blue bullet, howling madly as he yanked it out, Frequency lowering a ring-made sniper rifle as Skoodge and he hopped down from a parking lot nearby.

"You know, it says a LOTTA 'bout me that this ain't the weirdest thing I've ever seen." Knightly remarked dryly to the others as White rubbed his chin, glaring over at Gretchen. The pink-clad girl snuck over to Dib, giving him a playful peck on the cheek as he blushed visibly. Soon it was looking an awful lot like a rainbow line was all that was keeping a black-clothed mass of sadistic lunatics from rushing forward and annihilating the creators of thousands of parallel universes.

Speaking of, Jhonen Vasquez was helping Zim out of the toilet he'd been stuffed in, yanking hard and finally pulling him out as the maroon/ruby-eyed orange-and-black wearing Zim gazed at his creator.

"I know it's you." Jhonen said. "...I just know. You've gotten stronger...taller...but it's you."

"...you...made me." Zim realized softly as he looked up at the red-haired human. "...I'm...I am not sure what to say. I owe you so much, but..."

"You're angry."

"...I know the truth. It feels kind of...like you abandoned me." He admitted.

"I might not have always stuck up for you. I might not have always agreed with the fans. I might not have always been there for you. But..."
Jhonen put a hand on his shoulder. "I'm here now."

He promptly pulled out a Glock, loading it before Zim's eyes and smiling behind his glasses. Hey, sometimes the fans got reeeeeeaaal bad. "Let's get out there and kick some ass."

"Don't you understand what the Black Entity is doing? If he destroys the people here, all of you will cease to exist!" Fiyvr yelled out as he sat atop Maht's shoulder, the rest of the patron forces of Emotion standing by their hosts as they faced down the throng.

"We have all recognized his power...we knew what he is...and we all want him to succeed." A dark-looking, tall Zim said coldly. "My position of power is fading from me. My most loyal servant has left my universe, never to...come back. I have no love to cling to. I have no hope."

"I don't care about Earth. I set the place ablaze." One Dib said with a snort. "What's another to me?"

"I'm the goddamn GAZ. Don't tell me what to do!"

"To put it simply my fine friend..." A distinguished, monocle'd and goatee-wearing GIR said, steepling his claws. "We all know we are in Hell. And we would prefer simply not EXISTING...than going back to what we had."

"And if the whole multiverse goes with us, well, too damn bad!" A psychotic-looking Keef exclaimed, waving his powerful, tiny fists in the air...wearing a gimp costume.

"...put the ball back in." A version of Tallest Red behind him demanded. Keef sighed and popped a rubbery red ball into his mouth, giving two thumbs up to his master as our protagonists readied themselves, Sude holding the crowd of onlookers back with a glittering, pearly shield, his heart soaring with pride at the beautiful team-up before him.

"I've...I've never been prouder of all of you." He told them. "I only with Senior was here now to see it."

"Let's do this **right.** How about a roll call?" Jayd cried out.

"You're speaking my language, Irken!" Dib laughed, as everyone held their rings up high, bright light shining, rainbow luminescence blazing so brightly you could see it from miles away.

"In brightest day, in blackest night, no evil shall escape my sight, let those who worship evil's might, beware my power...GREEN LANTERN'S LIGHT!"

"For Hearts Long Lost. And Full of Fright. For Those Alone In Blackest Night. Accept Our Ring and Join Our Fight -- Love Conquers All -- With Violet Light!"

"In sympathy our hearts alight, rising high through blackest night! Our caring hearts can see what's right, with Compassion's guiding light!"

"With blood and rage of crimson red, ripped from a corpse so freshly dead, together with our hellish hate, we'll burn you all, that is your Fate!"
"In Blackest day. In Brightest night! Beware your fears made into light. Let those who try to stop what's right, burn under Panyck's searing sight!"

"In fearful day, in raging night, with strong hearts full, our souls ignite! When all seems lost in the War of Light, look to the stars, for hope burns bright!"

"In brightest day, in raging light, beware your-"

"NOW HOLD ON!" Everyone else screamed at Peech as Pyrsist smirked.

"Did you SERIOUSLY just try to steal OUR oaths?!!" Chulainn snarled angrily, clenching his clawed fists.

"Take this seriously." Panyck said coldly.

"Party-pooper. No cake for you." Peech remarked, rolling her eyes as she held her ring high, reciting her true oath. "This power is mine, this is my light. Be it in bright of day or black of night. I lay claim to all that falls within my sight, to take what I want, THAT IS MY RIGHT!"

The Black Entity calmly folded his arms as he smiled, a smile that was absolutely bone-chilling. He tilted his head slightly as his black-clothed army readied themselves.

"Well. I suppose it's only fair I say MY piece." He spoke softly, rising in the air on an open hand, held aloft by bony claws as his voice started out low, becoming high, powerful and cold. "See, I've got this NIFTY little trick I've been saving up..."

"Oh no, not THAT-" Sude whispered.

The Blackest Night falls from the skies. The darkness grows as all light dies. We crave your hearts and your demise. By my black hand...

"Ohhhhhh dear." GIR mumbled as THEY arose from the streets.

"Why can't anything STAY dead lately!?" Dite snapped furiously, the rotting stench of the hundreds upon thousands who had died in Atlanta, Georgia over the years rising from the graves, tearing themselves free of Earth. And all were very, very, HUNGRY.

"THE DEAD SHALL RISE!"

With that, our heroes rushed forward, rings glowing brightly as they shot out at the oncoming undead horde. Dite struck two Zim's heads together, smashing their skulls before decapitating a few undead and slicing them down the middle. Gaz belched out blood from her mouth, an acidic stench filling the air as it slowly dissolved her prey, Jourmungdr smushing undead in his massive coils as Feyr began forcibly crushing the windpipe of several Evil Dib's from behind his back.

"GAAAAAHHHHHHKKK!!" One psychotic Irken Prof. Membrane hacked out, grabbing his throat as his tongue was cut out, Spork licking his lips as he slurped it up.

"Easy for YOU to say." He remarked, leaping on the doppelganger.
"Cin-der-ell-a, dressed-in-yell-ah, went-up-stairs-to-kiss-a-fella! Made-a-mis-take, and-kissed-a-snake, how-many-doctors-will-it-take?" Miyuki cheerily sang out, her arms stretching out as she whipped at the undead hordes over and over, Pysche apologetically bowing her head over and over to the unfortunates as Panyck began scratching the eyes out of any undead nearby, Peech spinning around, slicing and slashing as she danced in and out of the mob of evil around her.

"GAH! Keep all your hands to yourself!" GIR yelled angrily at a smirking Evil...well, more Evil than USUAL Tak...as she leveled her PAK legs at him, pinning him to the ground. GIR promptly opened up his mouth, an enormous pulse cannon shooting out from the confines of his throat, the whine of the carbine making Tak gasp in horror before she was blown completely into the air in several dozen pieces. He cheered happily, beaming over at his master as Jhonen rubbed his chin, obviously impressed.

"Welcome to the circus of pain, you CLOWN!" Xeil roared out, beating several undead down as she leapt over them, her booted feet slamming into evil GIR, knocking his head clean off and smushing the body into scrap. Chulainn meanwhile was crushing the head of anybody within arm's length, his bladed tail going to town with decapitation techniques as Fiyvr began calmly explaining to a whining and crying Male Gaz why Maht was spanking him as Darth angrily kicked off a VERY undead woman from his staff. He'd gotten blood in his britches. Hmph.

"Do not hold back!" He yelled at Jayd and Dib as Jayd nervously leveled his ring at several undead schoolchildren that Nick was standing in front of, speaking to. "It would seem the zombies are regrouping!"

"Back to the hotel!" Sude yelled out, everyone rushing back inside the building, quickly trying to block up the windows and doors as Sude forced the oncoming horde back with gigantic clawed hands of white energy. "Hurry, hurry, hurry!"

"I can't believe he's gone this far." Dib said as he sat on a couch near a window, Gretchen autographing a fanboy's t-shirt before he went to the bathroom to make a new addition to the "Rate the IZ Characters Butt" graph. Time to add GRETCHEN!

"That's not Nick, Dib." Gaz said sagely. "There's nothing left of him."

"...oh, I dunno about THAT." Dib chuckled darkly, pointing out the window as everyone peeked outside. All of the zombies were now joining hands and singing, being led by, of all things... "MOM?!?" Azzy shrieked. "This goes WAY beyond sacrilegious!"

"Are they singing what I THINK they're singn'?" Frequency asked.

"All we wanna do is eat your brains!"

"We're not unreasonable. I mean, no one's gonna eat your eyes."

"All we wanna do is eat your brains!"

"We're at an impasse here, maybe we can compromise!"

"My Mom had a twisted sense of humor." Two sighed as he held his paw over his face, Miyu paling at the sight of her uncle joining in the singing, one arm wrapped around Undead Cass's as the song reached an end.
"Open up the door...we'll all come inside and EAT YOUR BRAAAAAAINS!"

"Okay, okay, I'll let you two in." Frequency called out from downstairs, everyone shrieking in horror as he opened the door, the undead parents of the MA eagerly approaching.

"What the hell is he-"

"He's got something behind his ba-" Pysche yelled out helpfully, interrupted by the sudden psychotic cry of one blue-furred bounty hunter.

"YA DON'T WANNA F—K WITH SHADY CUZ SHADY WILL F--KIN' KILL YOU!" Frequency yelled out, beating his undead aunt's head in with a nice-looking 35 millimeter, the others immediately scrambling away. Hey, they might have been undead, heart-chomping, brain-eating psychos, but this was Shady, man. And Shady would f—k-them-up.

The wall nearby was suddenly blown open. A grunting moan, cries for help...they'd forgotten about tall, dark and scary as green eyes widened in shock. "HE'S getting away!" Jayd yelled out at Dib, pointing at The Black Entity as it slung Zim and GIR over his shoulder, Jhonen lying nearby, bleeding from his stomach, unconscious...or worse. The medic raced to his side as Dib clenched his fists, looking in the direction that the Black Entity was going as it soared over the city.

Getting away? Not on his watch! He shot out of the broken-open wall and through the air, circling around as he finally caught sight of the Black Entity entering an alley. He shot down at it, racing through the darkness...

But he'd lost sight of him.

Where had he gone?

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...she reached up in her home, pulling it off the walls. Lard Nar put a single gloved hand on his sister's shoulder as he looked at her, then at the enormous rip in space and time that had opened up in their living room. He'd parked his spaceship outside and was hoping this wouldn't take long...and hoping that she'd come back alive when this was over.

"You're sure about this?" He asked her. "...are you sure this will even work? I mean, this is a long shot. And I know long shots. I was El Longshoto Grande."

"I'm sure." May said firmly as she slung it over her shoulder. "My man needs me. As in yesterday. Good thing these things are popping up everywhere...I can reach him easily."

"I'm not worried about you not reaching him. I'm worried that you might not come back." He told her firmly. ". . .May...when Mom and Dad died, I promised myself I'd always stand up against people like the ones that got them killed. It wasn't the good lord that got them killed, it was a bunch of cowardly bullies running them off the road in a game of "chicken", and now it seems like YOU'RE playing chicken with all REALITY, hoping it'll give before YOU do."
"We're ALWAYS playing "chicken" with reality, hoping life gives before we do." May said. "We just have to hope that the troubles we face have less courage than we do, and if we stick it out long enough, we usually get proven right."

She walked towards the Schism, turning around and smiling at him. "I'll be back in time to read the kids a bedtime story. Now you go take care of your OWN children."

"Huh?"

"Well, I'm more like dad was, and you're more like mom was. I mean, HE never wore a real shirt either..."

"Ohhh no! I am NOT a mom!" Lard Nar insisted, waving his hands in the air. "I AM NOT a mom!"

MEANWHILE, IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY...

"Dead man walkin'!"

"That wasn't funny the first five times." The Black Entity told GIR as he finished patching him up, Zim heaving and hurling the contents of his squeegly-spooch into a wastebasket nearby.


"Yeah, we're all one big, happy family, and you're the family dog, right?"

"I like to think so." GIR said, smirking broadly. "Which brings me to the 50,000 dollar question! Why are we still alive? We should be having pillow fights with Saint Peter right now!" GIR laughed.

"The real joke is that you think you'd make it to Heaven." The Black Entity chuckled darkly, rolling his eyes.

"Stay on point, Back-in-Black. You knifed Jhonen, dragged us here, and then, I say-I say-I SAY, suh..." GIR went on, imitating a certain famous rooster as he pointed at his chest. "You done WHUPPED me within an inch uh mah life! Y'all nearly sent me n' Zimmy to the funhouse in the sky!"

"Again with Heaven..." The Black Entity muttered, taking off his hat and looking at the horrors that lay beneath, shaking his head slowly back and forth before he stiffened with fury at GIR's next soft, dangerous words.

"You couldn't do it. You just COULDN'T finish us off. Looks like all that time with HIM really rubbed off on you. You take after Dib so much..."

THA-THLUCK. A knife to Zim's shoulder. GIR's eyes widened, the black blade digging in deep as Zim screamed in horror, tears springing to the little robot's eyes as he pleaded and begged. "STOP! PLEASE, STOP!"

The Black Entity calmly smiled, walking over to Zim and yanking the knife out, placing a hand on Zim's shoulder as a slightly sizzling sound filled the air, the wound cauterizing as GIR growled
darkly at him. "Know why I like shoulder wounds? One, they hurt like hell. TWO, they can
bleed you out and you'll be dead in minutes. THREE, they REALLY hurt like hell. FOUR,
they're easy to patch, and FIVE, they REAAAALLY hurt like hell." The Black Entity sneered.

He pointed a smoking finger on GIR's forehead, the little robot looking cross-eyed at his captor.
"Yes, I let you LIVE. But like every damned minute of your addling, posturing, psychopathic
life, you think this is about you. You and your master are fish bait. I've dropped you in the
brine to reel in the big fish. And I WHUPPED you, SUH...because it was too much fun NOT
to."

Zim began chuckling darkly, his eyes glinting with foul fire. "Well...well. Look at you. How far
you've come. You used to be so much like Dib...and now you want to be like ZIM." He hissed
cruelly. "How ironic."

"It'd be sad if you deserved any pity. I am NOT like you. I do what I do for good reasons, not
because the mood strikes me, not because I want to get a friggin' gold star from someone or
because I feel the need to launch chickens into space." The Black Entity snapped. "You,
clinically speaking, are fruitier than a basket of oranges."

He walked towards the door, turning around and smirking. "But I know a secret. A good one."

"Oh really? Tell Zim." Zim said, smirking as GIR helped his master up, Nick calmly kicking GIR
over and tying HIM up with Zim as he grinned cruelly down at them.

"Neither you nor your PET are nearly as crazy as you'd like us all to believe. Or even as crazy
as YOU'D like to believe."

The smile slowly faded from Zim's face, a dark scowl flickering across GIR's features.

"It just makes it EASIER to justify every sick, twisted, monstrous thing you've ever done
when you play the fool." The Black Entity patted the two on the head, leaving the room as he
began chuckling. "Lookit that. I wiped the smile off of Invader Zim's face. Been waitin' a
looooong time to do that. Heh-heh-heh-ha-HA-HA-HA-HA-HAAAAAA!"

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...Senior looked around the endless abyss of white, panel after panel passing by him as he walked
and walked. He kept calling out...but nobody seemed to be able to hear him.

He was trying to get ahold of the people he knew had the best chance of saving Earth-Prime. Yet
they were unable to hear. All seemed locked within their own world...hiding in their room, safe
within their womb.

Sighing, he sat down on a stump that materialized, shaking his head back and forth before he held it
in his white-gloved hands, the halo over his head drooping down. How was he going to do this?
...he couldn't do this alone, he realized. He had always thought this was something he had to do on his own, but when you thought about it, REALLY thought about it, he'd never truly been alone. There had always been people in the wings...supporting him...

Loving him.

...May.

...he wanted to see May...

And it was then that he heard it. The strumming of a guitar, a song beginning to be picked out as he heard her soft voice. He looked up from the stump at a stage across the way, pink eyes closed as May Nar played and played. An all-too-familiar tune, drifting out across the Schism, heads stiffening, tilting...

It couldn't be...

...could it?

_I've been driving for an hour...just talkin' to the rain...
You say I've been drivin' you crazy...and it's keepin' you away!_

Heads across the multiverse turning...eyes opening wide.

That song.

THAT SONG.

_So just give me one good reason...tell me why...I should stay!
Cuz I don't wanna waste another moment, in sayin' things we never meant to say!_

He approached May, smiling gently. This wasn't just any song. This was his song. THEIR song. The one that always managed to calm him. He could feel the familiar, joyful warmth of Life flowing through him again...it was like Sude was giving him that Blessing anew. But this time, the joy, the light, the ecstatic feeling of contentment came not from his patron, but from his wife...and from her beautiful, beautiful voice.

And now...it was his turn to sing.

_And IIIII can take it just a little bit!
IIIID hold my breath and count to ten!
IIIID keep waitin' for a chance you'll let me in!

With that, they embraced, even as the music kept playing all around them, other voices joining in, proud, happy, heroic. Shared souls brought together by what the song meant to them all.

__If I just breeeaaaaaathe, let me fill the space between__,
_I know...everything is alright!_
_Breeeaaaathe, every little thing, 'cept me,_
_You'll see..._
_Everything is alright...
In the endless abyss...from the works of fiction...

*If I just...breeeaaathe...*

Came forth true Life.

..."..."

..."..."

...Dib had tried searching for his missing "comrade". But instead...the Black Entity had found him.

Specifically, Dib had gone running right into the Black Entity's fist as the thing emerged from the shadows.

Zim was gone, GIR was gone, and he...was ready for him.

"This ends today."

"Nobody knows that better than me." Dib said softly, getting back up and dusting himself off. He leapt at the Black Entity, fist glowing with a powerful green aura, the two deciding to duke it out as the Black Entity ducked and punched Dib in the chin, then grabbed him from behind, raising his elbow up and bringing it down on Dib's head.

Or at least, he tried to. Dib's head slammed back, burning silver blood drizzling out from the Black Entity's nose as he staggered back, a quick roundhouse kick knocking the Black Entity clear over an alleyway's dumpster. "I TAUGHT you that move." Dib yelled at the Black Entity as it rose up, kicking the dumpster at Dib, who leapt away in time.

"You also taught me THIS."

THWA-THUMMMM! Dib was now sent careening through the air with a double-fisted hurtling punch from the Black Entity, and he slammed through brick wall into a bathroom. The Black Entity leapt after him, raising a fist, but Dib grabbed his arm and redirected him, launching him into a mirror. Woop! Seven years back luck.

The shattering glass was only the beginning. An instant later Dib grabbed the Black Entity's face and knocked it squarely against a sink over and over before he kicked him through another wall, the two landing in an old apartment condo's living room as Dib and the Black Entity struck at each other again and again.

"Tell me, what bothers you the most? That your greatest failure has taken everything you taught him and turned it against you, or that he's finally gotten STRONGER than you?"

"You don't KNOW what it means to be strong anymore!" Dib roared back, a punch in the side discombobulating the Black Entity as he performed a spinning back kick, knocking his foe into a couch. "You say you wanna be better than me, but it won't happen! NOT LIKE THIS!" He roared, grabbing ahold of a another couch and throwing it through the air.
The Black Entity was slammed through the wall again, landing in a bedroom as Dib approached, panting heavily, blood dribbling down the side of his head as the Black Entity struggled to get back up, coughing out blood.

"I KNOW I failed you, Nick. I carry that guilt every day. But I TRIED to save you. I'm...I'm trying to save you now. I couldn't live with myself if."

"It's always about YOU, isn't it?!" Nick yelled back furiously, tears springing to his eyes as he rose up, wiping his nose. "YOUR guilt! YOUR inner pain! Even now, trying to save me, it's more about YOU finding peace! Even when we were saving the world, it was about YOU beating Zim and YOU getting attention, not doing it because it was just the right thing!"

"..."

"But you know what?...I don't BLAME you, because that's just the way you were made. And you did TRY. You TRIED to be better than that. You're trying so hard now. Dib...I forgive you for not saving me." Nick said softly as Dib chewed his lip. "I really do."

"..."

"But why...WHY in the name of God's green Earth..."

THA-BAM! He kicked the nearby closet open, a tied-up Zim falling out, eye blackened, arm broken, blood dribbling down the side of his lip as he pitiably whimpered.

"IS INVADER ZIM STILL ALIVE?!?"

"Erm...old buddy? A lil' help here?" Zim nervously managed to get out, GIR sitting in the closet as well, shrugging stoically.

"I don't want to, like, rush you or anything, but HE'S OUT OF HIS FREAKIN' MIND!" GIR screamed. "AND I KNOW "OUT OF YOUR MIND"! I LIVE WITH IT!"

Dib folded his arms, looking from the Black Entity to GIR to Zim, then back at the Black Entity again as it clenched a fist in fury, gesturing at the tied-up twosome.

"Ignoring what he's done to you in the past, a childhood FILLED with stolen organs, endless fighting, days when you feared stepping outside your own home, ostracized by your peers for the most inane of reasons! Years of cruelty based on a lie, the lie that you were crazy! Let's ignore all that pain...and think about the pain you KNOW he's dealt to others, WILL deal to others, COULD deal to others! You looked into the Schism, Dilbert Membrane...you saw the truth!"

"..."

"The entire graveyards he's filled, the MILLIONS who suffered and died, the Tallest he's slaughtered, the friends and comrades he crippled and LOBOTOMIZED...you know, I"
"thought..." The Black Entity sighed deeply, holding one hand over his head. "I thought that after me...that I'd be the last person you'd ever let him hurt."

Dib said nothing. GIR just bowed his head, Zim sitting there quietly, chewing his lip.

"Because if it had been you that he'd cut into, peeling back flesh, slicing through bone, claws tearing into GREY MATTER...if it had been YOU that had been laid so low you couldn't even tie your shoes without help, then...I would have sent him off to Hell."

"You just don't get it. Maybe you never will." Dib finally said, shaking his head back and forth.

"What?" The Black Entity's soulless eyes narrowed. "Your moral code won't allow it Mr. "Will They Name His Autopsy Video After Me"? It's just too hard to cross that sacred line?!"

"NO! GOD almighty, NO!" Dib yelled, shaking his head back and forth, waving his arms in the air. "It'd...it'd be too damn easy for me."

The Black Entity's eyes focused intently on Dib's own behind the green mask he wore atop his face.

"For years a day didn't go by where I didn't envision taking him...putting him through a month of every sick, twisted thing he ever did to others...turning him into a broken, butchered, maimed, SCREAMING thing. I couldn't stop thinking about forcing him through the worst agony that exists and then, once it was all over...I would END him." Dib went on softly.

"Aw. So you DO think about me?" Zim said cheerily, trying to interject some humor into the situation. GIR whacked him with his foot, shutting him up.

"...but...but if I DID do that..." Dib murmured. "If I allow myself to go down into that dark place...I will never, EVER come back."

"Why?" The Black Entity murmured.

"What?"

"WHY do the cub scouts in spandex always say that?" The Black Entity chuckled sadly, pulling down his hat as he deeply sighed. Why do they say "If I cross that line, there's no coming back"? Dib..." He sat down in a chair, putting his head in his hands. "Dib, I'm not talking about taking an Uzi into school and gunning down everyone who called your head big. I'm not talking about snapping and going gay with Zim to make the Earth burn. I'm not talking about dunking your sister's head in the bathtub for all the years she shoved you down the stairs, or poisoning your pops for all the birthdays he missed. I'm talking about ZIM."

He gestured over at Zim, his voice now childlike, pleading. "I mean, JUST Zim...the one person who most deserves it...and if nothing, he deserves it because...because even though I lived through what he did...he still "took" me from you."

Dib held his hand over his mouth, hand curled into a fist, sighing as he lowered his head. "...I..."

"What?"
"...I can't. I'm sorry. I just can't." Dib insisted softly. "I have to be better than him. I have to be stronger than that...and not give in. I'd die for the Earth...but I can't sink so low that I'd murder for it."

"WE'RE BAAAAACK!"

The Black Entity was knocked clear through the wall as Two tackled him, bloody fire dribbling from his mouth and eyes, Miyu, Azazel and Frequency rushing in to pull Zim, Dib and GIR to safety. Two punched him over and over, snarling angrily. "I'll teach you to hurt my daddy! Get him out of here, WE'LL handle the Black Entity!" He yelled at Frequency, the bounty hunter carrying Dib and Nick under his shoulders, racing through the streets back to the hotel as Miyu and Azazel leapt on the Black Entity, rings shining brightly. It was time to kick some ass.

... ... ...

... "You blaze so brightly, baby, but it's all just bravado-" An undead Peggy Membrane laughed as Gaz whacked her head off with a baseball bat, she and the others being forced up the stairs by the oncoming horde. Every time one of the alternate universe beings was BEATEN, they were just immediately resurrected by the black light of the Entity of Death. Exemplar Rings tinged with his power glittered like a mass of flies lingering on thousands of hands as the hordes forced our protagonists higher up into the hotel.

"We can't stand this much longer!" Feyr roared out, slicing through another zombie, forcing it to collide with several others as they fell down the stairs.

"Dammit, we need a PLAN! We need HELP!" Gaz mumbled angrily.

"Chibi chucks?" Gretchen offered.

"NO!" Michael screamed. "Ask THEM for help!" He said, pointing at the fans behind them, several of them stupidly blinking.

"What're WE supposed to do?" Steve Ressel inquired.

"You're the Creators, the Originators!" Michael White told them furiously. "THINK!"

"...wait. What we write...came true. Why can't we write something to help them now?" Eric realized.

"Laptops! Who's got a laptop?" Jhonen yelled out.

Typing of hands, click-clack, click-clack. "Faster, faster!" White yelled as he tried to force a zombie's open maw back, Knightly feeding an AU-Tallest Purple his own fist.

"And then...the mighty Gaz made a super-duper bomb that could kill anybody cuz it had nanites that were made of kryptonite too!" One young fan read out loud.

POP! In an instant, a gigantic bomb appeared in Gaz's hands, ticking away. She let out a howling cry and launched it through the air, everyone ducking down in time to avoid an enormous shockwave of
flame and light that obliterated a huge horde of demonic GIRs.

"And then Ms. Knightly grew ten...feet...tall..."

"OW!" Knightly bumped her head against the hallway ceiling, angrily kicking several undead hordes back as several others grew in size, others gaining extra weapons, and Gaz had now gained an enormous, "Gundam Wing" esque type suit. They were doing it, they were forcing the zombies back down, further down the stairs and back out the main hall, back to the streets. The stench of blood and undead body parts filled the air as they continued their assault.

"Keep it up, we're DOING it!" Jayd cried out happily as he waved a green flag in the air, fist held high as he stood atop a pile of bodies, Tak now enveloped in WINGS and looking positively angelic as she held a lance high, looking vaguely like Wonder Woman. "Don't ever give up, EVER!"

"We're doing it, we're really doing it..." Tak realized as she kicked an AU version of her with enormously floppy breasts back onto an unconscious Irken Dib. "We can BEAT them-"

A powerful black beam shot through the air, a faint whine splitting their eardrums. Black fire shot out from the ground around her...

Pain...

PAIN...

The smoke cleared away, everyone gasping and hacking, struggling to stand up...looking in horror at the sight before him. Tak had a gaping hole in her chest, and was lying, dying, on the ground. The undead hordes were gone...the alternate universe THINGS were gone...

But the Black Entity was there, holding a dark scythe in his hands, eyes blazing...

A very, VERY near-death-looking Miyu, Azazel and Two to the side, in a pool of their own blood, their life draining slowly to mix with Tak's.

"...no." Senior whispered, emerging from the Schism with his wife, Sude's eyes widening in horror as Jayd let out a terrified scream, Dib rushing to Tak's side and holding her head in his lap as the Black Entity glared coldly at them all. "What have you done?"

"I'm doing...what needs...to be done." The Black Entity growled. "Out of the way so I may end the things that spawn that which brought so much pain."

"YOU'RE the only one who's brought so much pain." Sude growled furiously.

"You can't beat me." The Black Entity said coldly. "None of you Lanterns can match my strength. All of the Minor Arcana's power combined didn't even equal half my strength. And you, White Entity, can barely match me on a GOOD day."

"..."

"You'd need an ARMY to beat me." It said, its smile the work of demons.

"Oh, an army. Where, oh WHERE will I get THAT?" Senior chuckled, a faint tune rising into the
air, becoming stronger and stronger as the Schism glowed. "Well, you see...while you were playing Cowboys and Cowards, I took off to go and find myself."

And then...THEY came forth.

"In fact...you could say I really got to know myself." Senior chuckled as he gestured at the beings that now stood behind him.

"I might be an old dinosaur, but I can still bring the thunder as a protector of the right...the defender sworn to fight." A balding human said. He was clad in a blue jacket with jeans to match, and his face shown he'd endured many a trial...but that old brilliant light still shone brightly in his eyes.

"Doesn't matter if I've got skin, scales, fur or something else, I am a wild force, a guardian of the EARTH!" A beastly-looking, brown-haired, grey-furred thing said, clenching clawed hands tightly as he took up a fighting position, tie-dyed pants glistening brightly in the light.

"Looks like I came just in time to bring in a rescue at the speed of light!" A proud-looking blue-vested young man said, rubbing the mood cross necklace around his neck for good luck.

"Surrender now, or prepare to fight! Get ready for the maverick show-stopper comedy ninja!" a white-clothed, headband-wearing brown-haired human said proudly, slamming his fist into his palms.

"I've been racing through a thousand times to come here. And now it's time to save the world! Time to hero up!" A kid in a Hawaiian t-shirt said, giving a thumbs up to everyone nearby.

"My own galaxy might be long lost, but I'm ready for whatever you've got planned. A ranger never quits!" A white-haired being eerily similar to White said, adjusting the golden jacket he wore.

"I've never felt more proud...of being your patron." Sude said softly, eyes brimming with tears of joy at the amazing sight before him.

"It's time." Senior yelled out. "Time for Nick Grey, time for Senior the Irken, time for the White Rose Ranger to take things to the next level! READY?!" He yelled out, holding up a familiar belt, the others joining in.

"READY!"

The music grew loud and triumphant, the White Rose ranger grinning like a Chesire cat. Suddenly he was a kid again, the Kids WB blaring on the television, posing like his heroes, ready to kick butt. A blessed catharsis fell over him as he readied himself, getting into a fighting stance. "No more holding back. I've gained a new power...the power to save everyone. And I think it's time I used it. Specifically...IT'S MORPHIN' TIME!"
Dawn of a New Day

I was the first. The first sun.

I brought the morning light.

I was proud, I was noble, I was happy.

My name is Sude, and I was God.

I created many a planet, and basked in my work, taking in the warmth and the light that they gave me, indulging it in like a snake lying on a basking rock. I was happy with this, with new lights in the darkness around me.

But I wanted...more. It didn't feel like enough. And the reason was simple, once I looked over my work. I had made life, but not sentient life. I had not made creatures that could think and feel, hope and dream, that could love...that could live. An animal thinks only of survival. A person cannot stop thinking about how to truly live.

So I offered up my prayers, and from a thousand points of light, they came. From the colors of the rainbow they stepped out. The only thing they cared for...was loving each other. Loving others. And loving me. I have never, and may never again, see a race so filled with such tenderness and gentleness of spirit as the Seraphi.

But I did not choose a Seraphi as my "Varati", my angel, my special host. No. I chose an Irken. Child of knowledge and will. I chose a "bug", a bug with a spirit that was pure human.

But he has something that I had been waiting for, waiting for so long.

He has love. Love for all the people in the realm that so many regard as nothing more than flight of fancy.

He's the most moral and upstanding Irken I've ever seen. And with the White Exemplar Ring of Life on him and his desire to defend the innocent guiding him, he's immensely powerful.

And that might just keep him from dying in the next few minutes.

"No more holding back. I've gained a new power...the power to save everyone. And I think it's time I used it. Specifically...IT'S MORPHIN' TIME!"

Senior held up the belt and wrapped it around his waist. "White Rose Power! HA!" He cried out.

White wrapped the belt around his waist, giving a proud thumbs up. "Ranger up, HA!"

"Lightspeed!" The blue-vested youth laughed loudly, whipping the belt around in the air before slapping it on. "RESCUE!"
Grey held up his clawed hand, holding the belt high as he whipped it around his waist. "Wild Access, HA!"

"Time for...Time Force!" The Hawaiian child yelled proudly, leaping into the air and wrapping the belt around his waist before landing expertly, giving a victory sign in the air.

"Dino Thunder, power up!" The older, balding man roared out, whipping the belt around his body like it was a bandoleir.

"Ninja Storm, Ranger Form, HA!" The headbanded youth cried out, whipping the belt around his head to add to the headband he wore as he struck a battle pose.

"White Rose Ranger!" Senior said proudly, clenching his fist. His outfit now was slightly less muscular, but a small and slightly worn cape flowed from him now, with the halo he wore now more over his head than it had been before. He looked more...humble. Supportive.

"Master of Time, Michael White!" The gold-jacketed White called out, a blazing white shirt with the emblem of Life on his undershirt and a proud tattoo atop his forehead.

"The Rescuing Ranger, Nick is here!" Nick laughed happily, now dressed in white superhero attire, complete with a visor across his eyes, a flowing long cape, and a "D" and "N" displayed on the back of said cape, the symbol for Life on his well-sculpted chest.

"Wild Nature's Release, Grey, the STRENGTH!" Grey cried out, his pants now dazzling shades of white, the symbol of Life etched onto his belt buckle and on his chest as well.

"Multiverse Protector, Nick!" The Hawaiian kid Nick yelled, his shirt now a blazing white like his shorts, his mood necklace displaying the symbol of Life.

"White Ranger of Ages Gone By, Roaring Proudly...Mr. Grey!" Mr. Grey roared, his jacket a fine shade of white with a silver undershirt, wearing gloves and boots and a helm atop his head that made him look almost like an urban knight.

"Ninja Defender of Life, Nick!" The headband-wearing youth said proudly, his wrist and armbands showing the symbol of Life like his shirt and thick headband, grinning triumphantly.

"If ANYBODY'S a part of the White Lantern Corps, it's US!" They cried out.

"Get lost!" The Black Entity yelled as he spun his scythe through the air with a rapid pace, his Black Lantern army surging forward to tussle with Dib and Zim and the others as whatever "normal" humans could joined in, using pipes, sharpened pencils and very heavy autograph books to fight. Jhonen Vasquez was beating a female Tallest Red and Purple to death with a fan encyclopedia. Eric Trueheart was trying to tie up a psychopathic Keef with his own gimp costume. Steve Ressel was currently choking a crazy Miyuki with his own beard.


"I don't like speedsters!" The Black Entity hissed, slicing Michael White across the chest, suddenly gaping as another white-haired being grabbed him and carried him off to go heal, grinning down at his double.

"Hey there, handsome thing." White told White, laughing slightly. "Would I do me? Oh yeah. I'd do
me. I'd so do me."

"You're quoting "Buffalo Bill"? You philistine...still..."

The Black Entity had one foot on the mammalian being's head as it tried to break itself free of the black construct chains he'd been wrapped in, the Black Entity raising his scythe up before he was blasted straight off of him and into a hole, the Whites stepping up to it with "Agent Orange" aiming an orange energy construct of a hose at the Black Entity.

FFFFSSSSHHHH!

"GLAARGGGHHUUUGGHHLLL!"

"IT PUTS THE LOTION ON ITS SKIN OR ELSE IT GETS THE HOSE AGAIN!" The two Whites shouted out.

"Why are you stabbing yourself, why are you stabbing yourself?" Gaz chuckled darkly as Knightly, having stuffed a Black Lantern Bob's hand into a giant pencil sharpener, began using his own arm to stab his head.

"Me-ii-ah-hee! Me-ii-ah-hoo! Me-ii-ah-hah! Me-ii-ah-HA-HA!" GIR sang out as he danced around, yellow knives carving into Black Lantern flesh around him as he did the Numa Numa crossed with some kind of Michael Jackson groove, Spork elongating his legs and doing high-jump kicks that were so potent they were launching evil MIMIs miles away.

"You sure you weren't a Russian Bottle Dancer in a past life?" Tak managed to chuckle out as Jayd lifted her up onto his shoulder, whisking her off to safety so he could properly heal her as Miyuki and Xeil ran at each other, quickly racing up into the air on each other's footsteps as two Black Lantern versions of Dib and Zim collided with each other, knocking themselves out.

"Hold up. We need to stop this crazy thing." Peech insisted to Dite as a bellowing mad female Sizz-Lorr raised a deadly-looking spatula overhead, intent on serving them up with deep-fried green tomatoes in a cheese sauce. Dite calmly snapped her fingers, a red spark shining up from her clawed, gloved hands as a giant red helm slammed over his head, blinding him as he struggled to remove it. It didn't help that he had such an unusual head shape like Nick...

"There. Your move."

KA-KLOOOONK! A giant 100-ton safe made of orange energy slammed into the fry lord as he let out a loud, pained groan, Dite slapping her face and rolling her eyes as Chulainn kept tearing people's hearts out. "Low quality finish."

"Kiss my ring, girlfriend." Peech giggled, Panyck carrying a Glocknar Black Lantern into a nearby dumpster and dropping him in with a THU-WHUMPH.

"How are all these Black Lanterns getting through the Schism?!" The superhero-outfitted youth yelled out as he struggled to push one bulky-looking male Gaz back inside the white rift as she promised to "Rip 'em off, chop 'em off, and then "crush 'em". How indeed.

"FLY, my pretties! Fly, FLY!" Verminthrax howled eagerly, the demonic dragon waving his arms in
the air with Johnny the Homicidal Maniac holding up a sign that pointed squarely at the Schism, dozens of other beings from across the realms travelling through the Base Earth and into the Schism that led right to "Earth Prime". Mortos Der Soulstealer held his clawed hands over his mouth, nervously jumping back and forth as he struggled to think of something, and think of something FAST.

Meanwhile, Skoodge was helping with Tak, trying to look over her wounds and frowning deeply at the sight as Jayd's nanogenes desperately struggled to patch them up. "...they don't seem to be working. Your power is the green light of Willpower, but he struck out with Death's full force. It's amazing she's still alive at all. We need the White Light."

"Go, go, get Senior here, NOW!" Jayd insisted, shaking Skoodge back and forth, a panic entering his dark green eyes as the tubby Blue Lantern rushed off to go find Senior in the chaos. It looked like somebody had belched a rainbow all across Atlanta, Georgia...the fights were spilling out into every nook and cranny, it was becoming increasingly hard to avoid getting shot at by somebody's ring if you were wearing vibrant colors...

Senior, as it were, was standing by the Hawaiian-clothed youth and the ninja in the headband, the two pouring their powers on at a gigantic-boobed female Irken with a copious amount of earrings, eyeliner and nail polish.

"Sue, is that YOU under there?"

"Can't...stop...them... they just keep getting bigger and bigger!" She sobbed slightly.

"What SICKO thought this up!?" Senior screamed out.

A pimply looking kid with dark hair nervously tucked away his stain-colored laptop, sneaking out behind the dumpster as Fiyvr sighed, shaking his furry head back and forth as he sat atop of an unconscious evil Lard Nar's head. "That kid seriously needs to just go out and get some. You know, there IS that nice girl over there with the chainsaw."

"And to think, they said kids today aren't passionate about things." Feyr chuckled as he watched Jourmungdr hold down a group of crazy screw-headed aliens as a girl nearby raised the chainsaw up, cutting through their black-clothed-covered heads.

"Oh, you know, I was just talking to my friends the other day, monsters live the most FASCINATING lives." Maht commented cheerily as he did the nails of a stunned-as-all-heck doughnut creature with clawed hands and a stupid expression on its sprinkled face. Where it had come from was ANYBODY'S guess. "Now let's dip our little pretties in dah wat-ahhhhh." He sang out, easing the thing's newly-painted purplish/pink nails into a large bowl.

CHA-CHOMA-CHOMP!

Piranha by the dozens leapt out of the bowl and began working their way up as Maht lowered his ring and the bowl vanished. "I feel guilty about this." He told Frequency as Frequency patted a nearby fishtank full of the "little dudes". "I should go make shoes for orphans later."

Senior, meanwhile, was now grappling with the Black Entity as he held up an energy construct in the form of two Colt Anacondas, blasting away at his foe's scythe as it twirled and twirled, slicing the bullets in half. "Even after ALL the unfair cruelty leveled upon Earth, even after all of their mistakes, you side with some of the worst, most pathetic individuals to ever grace the printed page! The boy is
a glory-seeking little brat! The girl is a selfish, amoral bitch! The robot is an out-of-control lunatic! And Zim is a tiny Hitler in a DRESS!"

"Hey, I know the formula might not work, and I know that Zim is a real big jerk, but I find it very hard to hate an alien in a skirt." Nick chuckled.

"IT'S NOT A SKIRT!" Zim screeched out as he banged a female version of himself with overly big eyelashes against the nearby wall, an act of catharsis if ever there was one. "WHY DOES EVERYONE KEEP SAYING THAT?!"

"Why do you fight for them?!" The Black Entity roared out, leaping forward and slicing through the energy constructs, kicking Senior in the face and then slamming the butt of the scythe into his chest, knocking him to the ground. "You're a fool!"

"No, I'm heavily armed!" Nick laughed out, whipping out a repeating-action machine gun from his PAK, firing it off and forcing B.E.N back before rushing forward and smacking him across the face. The Black Entity fell down to the ground as Nick stood over him, Jayd rushing to his side.

"Why are you doing this? The world of Invader Zim is twisted and cruel, filled with irredeemably foul people...yet you side with them...you HAVE to understand why I'm doing this!" The Black Entity insisted.

"I'm not completely fighting for them. Yes, I want to keep Dib and Zim and the others alive and safe. But above all, I fight for the ideals that they have, I fight for the POTENTIAL they have within to be good."

"And in turn, the potential YOU have, for you are as flawed as they are!" The Black Entity snarled, leaping up and grappling with Senior as Darth gasped in shock at the waves of energy careening off of them. Everyone was being forced away from the two as shockwaves rippled through the air and ground, everyone was struggling to contend with two different tastes that filled their mouths, one that felt like a breath of air after finishing with a mint, the other like inhaling smog.

"EVERYONE'S got flaws! Look, the Irkens want to force their way of life onto others, and they don't realize that much of life is SUBJECTIVE. Their way doesn't work, if anything, they need help understanding that! And YOU need help understanding that too! What's good for the goose isn't ALWAYS gonna be good for the gander!"

Senior began pushing B.E.N back further and further along the street as the waves of energy increased, lightning splitting the sky above as the whole area became enveloped in a kind of strobe light effect, black and white, black and white, light and dark repeating endlessly, blinding and illuminating every other second.

"You need HELP!"

"NOBODY can help me. OR YOU!" The Black Entity snarled out, suddenly headbutting Senior in the head as he launched his scythe through the air.

Darth held up his staff, focusing in on the brilliance of the White...
"GET THEE BEHIND ME, SATAN!" He roared, a shimmering, pearly hand snatchng the scythe up in midair and hurling it back at B.E.N, embedding it deep into the middle of his head.

He let out a SCREAM. And with that, the Black Lanterns and various foul entities the others had been fighting began to be sucked back into the Schism as Darth grabbed Jayd's arm, pulling him away, back to Tak's side as Senior raised his ring up at the gasping, coughing-blood Black Entity.

"Hold on." Darth said gently, making Jayd lie down by Tak as Dib toweled off her sweating brow as best he could, Skoodge shaking his head back and forth.

"She is seconds from dying, my Cardinal."

"Call me...Hierophant." The green-eyed Irken said gently, raising one hand up to his eye...as he began to unscrew it. With a few quick turns, the implant had popped out into his palm, and a faint, pinkish light emanated from within as he pulled out...

A Pink Exemplar Ring.

"I still kept it after all these years. You never forget your first time." He chuckled, slipping it on as he began to channel both the Light of Compassion and the Light of Love. "Hmm. Tastes like I've got sugar AND wine in my mouth." He admitted as he took hold of Jayd's chest and laid one hand on Tak's. "I never forgot how to do THIS either." He added, putting his eye back.

His clawed hands began to shine with violet light as he closed his eyes, the symbol for Love stretching across the his body to join the other tattoos he proudly displayed. "**Your heart...is his heart...his heart...is YOUR heart...**"

His eyes then shot open, burning pink as a surging power wave rippled through Jayd and Tak's bodies, Skoodge and Dib gasping in surprise as they lit up like Christmas trees. **"WITH AN INFUSION OF LOVE, COMPASSION AND WILL...THESE HEARTS SHALL BE MADE ONE!"** He roared out, as a blinding light shot through the alley, making Dib and Skoodge shield their eyes.

A moment later, Tak was sitting there, no longer transparently green, no longer buzzing with Willpower energy. She was now dressed in a fine dark green and black outfit with long black boots and gloves, her midriff exposed and the symbol of Willpower emblazoned on her chest.

"...wow." Dib whispered, Tak feeling her body as concern flickered in her eyes. "You look...you look **really** good."

"Jayd. Where's Jayd?" She found herself asking.

"I'm here."

A sparkle from her ring, and in an instant, a pair of green arms gently held her tight as a head nuzzled hers. "You were looking out for me for so long...now I can return the favor. I'll be your knight, milady...now as always..."

The "always" lingering in the air, Darth sighed as Jayd faded back into the ring. "I didn't know that would....it should have..."
"You did all you could." Tak insisted gently, taking his cheek and then giving him a quick peck. "Thank you."

He immediately turned red as a beet, "ah-huh-huh-huh-ing" before his eyes rolled back and he fainted dead away, Skoodge shaking his head back and forth as he realized he was the only one capable of starting CPR, Dib laughing hysterically at the sight.

"How?!!" Verminthrax howled in surprise as he watched the beings he'd summoned be swiftly sucked back through the Schism and into their own respective worlds. "How is this even possible-"

He was suddenly slammed to the ground, tied up in crimson bands of pulsing magical energy, the Seraphi gasping in surprise as Mortos held two claws up, proudly smiling as Nny was deposited right next to him, Mortos chuckling darkly.

"Wh-what are you doing?"

"What I should have done much sooner." Mortos said with a cold smirk. "I remember now how I became what I am. AUFERO MAGUS INFUSCO!"

Pinkish energy tinted with a faint black sliver began to encase Verminthrax and Johnny the Homicidal Maniac as the two's bodies began to pulse and throb, their eyes glowing brightly as Johnny desperately tried to drag himself away, Mortos shaking his head back and forth, waving a claw in the air. "Don't fight your transformation, Johnny. AUFERO MAGUS INFUSCO!"

"GAAAAH!!" Johnny could feel Verminthrax seeping into him like jelly being forced into every pore, could feel his bones and belly stretching, his fingers merging, keratin claws replacing what he'd once had as his hair grew even longer, his face becoming pockmarked.

"You are...you must be..."

"AAAUUUUEEEEHMMM!!"

THWOOOM!

"MORTOS DER SOULSTEALER!"

...

...

...

... The change...could haaappen anyday...so says the Whipporwill...
That hangs 'round for...the seeds I leave...
Out onnnn the windowsill...
"Be free, you fool! Be free, you fool!"
She sings all afternoon...
Then as if to shoow me how it's done...
She leaps into the blue...

Meanwhile, back at Atlanta, Georgia, the police were desperately trying to get whatever unarmed civilians they could out to a safe range, with the rest staying behind to assist. How? Why, even as we
speak, they were careful exercising their constitutionally-protected second amendment rights.

Mostly in the direction of the Black Lantern.

"You're all really pissing me OFF!" The Black Lantern furiously snarled, his voice reaching an almost guttural, inhuman level of baleful intent and foul attitude. "All of you will die horribly, in fact...except for little Gaz, who will be my plaything for all eternity, watching forever as I torture this world for what it's done!"

BLAM-BLAM-BLAM-BLAM! Senior lowered the construct creation of his repeating-action machine gun and nodded in the direction of a nearby human. "Nice, eh?"

"Every American shuld feel safe with their own handgun." The man said as the Black Lantern popped his eye back in.

"You fight me like I'm alive. I'M DEATH, THE BLACK ENTITY!" The Black Entity roared out, slamming his scythe into the ground as tendrils of darkness shot out like an octopus going into a frenzy, striking at those within his eyesight as he hissed and snarled. Every new minute turned his voice even more feral and twisted.

"And I'm da Goshdam Batman." The caped-wearing superhero youth chuckled, striking the Black Entity on the side of his head and launching him through the air at GIR, who kicked him over in Gaz's direction.

"So much MEAT to cut through, and SUCH a mouth on him! But not for LONG!" Gaz yelled, striking him in the side of the head with her chainsaw construct, knocking him through the air as Darth tried to focus in on Gretchen's power, Knightly and her beloved doing a lovely polka dance with spiked stilettos atop of the Black Entity's struggling-to-get-up body.

"Come on, come on, focus on the...GRRRR..."

"GRAAAAH!" A shockwave blast sent Knightly and White flying into Gretchen and Feyr as the Black Entity launched burning, black-tinted giant skulls at our beloved protagonists, forcing them back further and further, turning to then deliver a powerful fist punch to Dib as he struggled to stay up, the Black Entity punching him again and again, trying to knock him to his knees, Dib refusing to do so.

No. A soldier desn't fall down.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

A soldier...stands...

THA-THRACK! Zim struck Black Entity Nick in the back of the head with a large construct of a rubber chicken that had a brick stuffed into it as he focused his PAK lasers, blasting at the Black Entity's back and launching him free from Dib. "TOUCH MY FRIEND AGAIN AND I'LL KILL YOU! I'LL KILL YOU TO DEATH!" Zim promised.

Even the "I'll kill you to death" line didn't distract Dib from the "why" behind his rage, and his eyes widened in surprise as Zim looked over at him.
"You're the best friend I've really got." He admitted shyly. "...nobody else treated me as an equal until you. Nobody else respected me the way I wanted until you."

"Isn't that sweet." The Black Entity coldly growled, powerful talons ripping up from the ground, black lightning surging through them as the Black Entity lowered his ring and coldly smirked. "If —kin' HATE sweet."

"GUARRRRRGCCNNH!!" Dib screeched.

"UUUAAAAAIIEEEEE!" Zim howled.

The Black Entity smiled, his grin the work of demons. "Heh. I know the truth. SHE thought you all could get BETTER, Frequency thought you could all get better, that's why he sided with you. You even convinced Azzy and the rest to join in, but I know the truth. You'll never be as good as Cassie was, you'll never understand how wonderful Both S—"

"THERE IS NO WAY I AM LETTING YOU BREATH WHEN MY MOTHER IS NOT!" Miyu screamed, the tears trickling down from beneath her visor as she strangled the Black Entity from behind, her ring glowing orange and yellow, a knife digging into the Black Entity's stomach as her sharp claws dug into his neck. He angrily snarled, black, tarry, bloody rust slowly eeking out of his mouth before he managed to shove her back and grab her arm, ripping it free as he aimed his other fist at her in an uppercut.

KRAKKA-THRUCK!

The helm came off and he threw another punch.

There was a horrifying, sickening THRUCLCHA-KRACK and he pulled his fist back...brains and wires and computer banks dripping off his fist as Miyu staggered back, horror and shock visible in her compound eyes...a fourth of her head now missing, the inner workings of her mind exposed.

"NO." Azazel whispered softly, rising from the ground as Two launched himself at the Black Entity with a furious howl, his ring sparkling red and green as an enormous bow manifested in his hands. He shot forth rapid-fire arrow-shaped blasts that rippled through the air, slamming into the black-clothed being before a clawed gauntlet sent the Black Entity flying back, Azzy rushing to his beloved's side.

"You will BURN for that." Two promised, the Black Entity pulling out an exploding arrow from his chest a bit too late, his arm and hand being blasted off, slowly reforming before Two's eyes.

"Why are you so mad? You're making me into this. You all made me everything you're made about the moment you turned your back on the realm that gave you birth!"

"Nobody MADE you rip my bestest girl buddy's arm off!" Two screeched, leaping on the Black Entity, teeth digging into the top of his head as he bit and chewed and ripped.

"Who let this noodle be a Minor Arcana?" The Black Entity remarked, grabbing him and tossing him through the air.

"You're not WORTH hating!" Zim cried out as he angrily smacked the Black Entity across the face with the back of his hand, kicking him through the air. "Why, Zim feels SORRY for you!"
"Others look at our exploits and find inspiration! They find a community to belong to!" Dib called out as he clapped his hands together, his ring shooting a shockwave of energy that forced the Black Entity back.

He rose up, growling and smiling coldly. "I think I know what you're saying. I don't know what it's like to be them. But you don't know what it's like to be me. At least...not YET!" He laughed, sweeping his scythe as an enormous black ring shot through the air. "Like they say, if you can't beat 'em..."

"NO!" Zim leapt through the air, the ring attaching to HIS finger, and instantly his attire changed, going from orange and black to grey and black as he spun around, howling and screaming, smoke of different colors rising off of him as an ethereal voice echoed in the air.

What do you fight for? A delusional demand for respect. WILLPOWER.

"GAAAAAAAAH!!!"

Who do you feel sympathy for? You regret what you did to the boy. COMPASSION.

Zim panted and heaved, green and blue smoke rising from his body as his body became sketchy and white in color, reduced to the "bare bones" as his muscles faded, and he became the dress-wearing wimp he usually was as orange smoke drifted from his mouth.

What do you want? Everyone to love you. AVARICE.

He struggled to stand back up, veins appearing on his forehead as his focus slowly returned...

Who are you afraid of? Being a failure, always alone. FEAR.

"S-STOP! C-CAN'T...WON'T..."

What do you hate?

WHO

DO

YOU

HATE?!

And with that, he let out an enormous roar as blood rained from his mouth, his body becoming hulking and monstrous as a cape flowed from his back, his eyes bloodshot and foul. He clenched his fists tight, snarling and hissing as he glared at the Black Lantern, drenching him in bloody flames.

Yourself. For what you have become. RAGE.

"NO!" Zim screamed out. "I don't hate...ME...GRRR! GAZZZZ!" He snarled at Gaz, pointing an accusing finger at her. "You! You t-thought you were BETTER than everybody! You and your s-stupid brootherrrrr!"

He heaved and snarled, the flames rising around him as people carefully slunk away from him, Zim punching the ground in a fury. "I NEVER wanted to be BETTER than everybody! I-GRRR!"
Just...just wanted to fit IN! Zim wanted to MATTER! To be heard! But nobody listened!

Darth held his staff up and focused, twirling it around as a pink tether shot into Zim's back, the familiar voice rising back up again, now gentler in tone.

**Who do you love?**

And with that, the Black Entity was blown through the air by a pillowing blast of pinkish flame as Zim clenched his fists and rose into the air on violet wings, the images of Dib, of Gaz, of Cass, of Miyu and Two and his family appearing on each wing. "I LOVED THEM! I LOVED THEM ALL!" He screamed out, B.E.N hitting the ground with a horrible CRUCHA-THRUD as Zim's powers began to fade, his appearance returning to orange and black as he fell to his knees.

"I...loved them all...so much more...than I ever told them..." He whispered, looking at his hands. "...I never really get what I deserve...maybe I never will. They made me hurt people...they made me hate and kill. I just wanted to matter, but I can't make my own decisions. Why does it have to be like that?"

He buried his face in his hands, softly weeping. "I do hate myself. Zim hates what he's become. They made me into an Invader. But I could have been so much more. " He wiped his face free on his arm and sniffled as Dib helped him up and over to Gaz and GIR. "...don't I deserve a happy ending?" He asked them.

"EVERYONE deserves better, Zimmy." The Black Entity chuckled coldly. "But Life always shafts us." He looked to the side to see the assembled Nicks standing with the others, all of them holding their rings up. "...oh no. You're not SERIOUSLY going to...that NEVER works." He chuckled, shaking his head back and forth.

"What does and doesn't work keeps changing as the times change. We can't have what we once had all the time. We can't go back. But that doesn't mean things can't still be good in a different way." Senior said gently.

"You'll NEVER beat me!" The black-clothed being hissed, his voice no longer recognizable, his every word a mix of growls, roars, snarls and chirping like a throng of disgusting animalistic bugs. Every trace of humanity that had been in his face seemed long gone, and all that was lingering was something...else.

"It's not about beating you." Grey said calmly.

"You just don't get it, do you?" White spoke sadly.

"I'm sorry for everything you went through...everything that happened to you...but that doesn't excuse what you've done, what you're doing." The blue-vest-wearing youth murmured quietly.

"Together, then." The elder gentlemen commented softly.

"Heh. Believe it." The headband-wearing teen laughed slightly.

"All together now." The Hawaiian-clothed youth insisted.

Senior raised his ring as Sude stretched his rainbow wings wide, and the chant came forth, the other
Lanterns joining in with the assembled do-gooders, their voices rising, a power, a song within them all...

"In Brightest Day, through Blackest Night, No other blaze will burn as bright!"

A thousand, hundred, MILLION points of light all shining and blending into one powerful stream of white, aiming squarely at the Black Entity as he raced forward, his scythe held up, ready to tear, but facing those unafraid.

"Let those who try to halt what's right..."

Dib turned and smiled slightly at Zim, who gave him the best thumbs up the could.

It all felt so...

...right.

"burn like my power..."

B.E.N stopped in that instant, and for a moment, Nick WAS there, standing still, dropping the scythe as he held his arms out, closing his eyes. "Remember that I love you." He said simply.

"WHITE LANTERN'S LIGHT!"

...

...

...

...he struggled to carry himself, further and further. All he could think about was how much of a coward he felt he was. The people he loved might still be fighting, and he'd been so weak that he couldn't even stay behind to fight...

The tree bark felt cool against his hands as he struggled to walk further and further through the hillside, the wind gently blowing. He ran from that terrible city and the long black night, thinking of Miyu and Azazel and his mother and his world. He ran and ran and ran, the horror, the terror, all of it replaying in his head, all his failures, all his losses, all on an endless loop...yet still he ran. And ran. And ran.

Perhaps too hard. He fell down like a leaf, collapsing onto the ground, feeling the grass against his face as he swayed slowly back up to his knees, panting and heaving, a dry, starchy feeling rising from his mouth to-

Sparkles of golden/amber light...sparks from the wheel...sparks from the wheel, why was he thinking of that poem? What else did he remember? Yes...the captain, oh my captain, you've fallen, cold and dead...

He was dying. He could see his hand giving off the light as it began to cascade up into the blue skies above, he could feel his grip on reality leaving him.
Was this how he died? A childish whisper left his mouth as he felt the tears slowly welling in his beautiful eyes.

"...I don't wanna go."

And with that, the golden fire enveloped him. He screamed and he screamed and he screamed...

And when he finally fell down, hitting the cool green grass as a gentle feathery wing descended upon him, unconsciousness claimed him. A blanket of a dozen colors slowly draped itself over him, and before he fell into slumberland, he was aware of one cathartic realization...

Zerinim Two Jookiba was gone.

And the chaaaange could haaaaaappen anyday...
Or so say all the guards...
In the prison I have built around...
My sooooolitary heart!
I tell myself that I'm alright...
That it's not-so-bad-a-place!
But the truth is I'm just scared to death...
Of walkin' through that gaaate!

...the sun also rises, as they say.

The skies above had never looked more bright and beautiful. It was as if a new chapter had been reached. All Senior could think of was the old childhood saying he and his brother had used whenever they'd lost the baseball they were playing with. "Do-over, do-over"...

The world would begin again. Their lives...were a do-over.

...except for one, he noted with deep sorrow as he kneeled by Miyu, Azazel holding her hand gingerly as the tears fell openly down his cheek. The others stood around, unsure of what to do...what COULD they do, her image was fading before their eyes. She would soon be utterly gone.

"Heal her." The Beautiful Angel begged of Sude, Patron of Life. "...please."

"I am so very sorry. I truly am." Sude whispered, shaking his head back and forth, tears brimming in his own eyes. "...I cannot. Her wounds are beyond physical, beyond mental, beyond emotional, beyond spiritual. Her very tether to reality is slipping away. She's..." He chewed his lip.
"...sometimes in this line of work, you just see people...get away from you." He murmured mournfully, covering his eyes with his arm.

"Please. Please don't leave me all alone." Azazel whimpered quietly, hand digging into his beloved's. He could already feel his mind beginning to forget his mother as he felt Miyu's life ebb away into his soft hands...he couldn't remember how good it had felt to be in his mother's arms...his father's hand
on his when he'd become a Ranger, Commander Lightyear beaming proudly…he couldn't remember…

Couldn't remember the first time he'd kissed her…

"Please. It can't end like this. It's not fair. It shouldn't end like this."

Miyuki, Tyrangia of the "Arrowhead" Division of Star Command, chuckled slightly, her voice having lost the once metallic, cold undertone that had run through it. Now it was soft, quiet, almost like the whisper of wind past your ear.

"I get it now." She told him as the others looked on, unsure of what to say, what to do. "I understand what Cass was trying to tell us." She reached up as best she could, wiping a tear off the angelic being's face. "My Angel, my Only…I will always be will you. Even if you can't see me. I'll always be there. That's what she was trying to say, Azzy."

She smiled. "It's not going to end. It is never going to end for us..."

Her head slowly rested against the ground, looking up into the sky, a cloud above in such a familiar, long-needed shape.

...it was time.

"...maneem...A-Tyr...I'm ready. To infinity...and beyond..."

And with that...she made her peace, Azazel, the "Diabolical" Self of Experiment 421 covering his eyes with one arm as he silently wept, Frequency placing a paw on his shoulder, a tear trickling down through his furry cheek as Zim knelt to the ground, understanding all too well.

"It's not going to end. It is never going to end for us..." He whispered.

And the change could happen anywhere...
So saaaaaaid the mountaineer!
Before he turned to face his cliff...
Withooooout a trace of fear!
Yodel-lay-hee-hoo! Yodel-lay-hee-hoo!
He sang right up untiiiiiil...
He caught sight of...that open blue...
And became a whipporwill!
He caught sight of...that open blue...
And became a whipporwill!

...

...

...

... One by one they had returned.

One by one they had gone back.
And soon, the Base realm of I-Z would be left to its rightful inhabitants.

Life was supposedly going to "return to normal", or as normal as life got, most assumed. Though there definitely would be changes...oh yes. Mortos had wished them all a fond farewell, Lard Nar was taking the Resisty back into space after shooting an episode of his show right on Earth to promote intergalactic television, and there was a newfound sense of respect leveled at Dib now that people knew the truth.

So really, life wasn't going to just "go back to normal". Things were decidedly much, much different, and they could all feel it.

Sitting on a hillside, the sun began to rise over Philadelphia as GIR slowly bounced his head back and forth, singing as Gaz petted his head, Zim and Dib looking at each other before glancing back over the city as the morning rays cascaded out across steely tops.

"Words are flowing out like endless rain into a paper cub, they slither while they pass, they slip away, across the universe!"

"Reconstruction continues in the heart of Philadelphia, donations flying in from across the world, ordinary folks offering everything they can, despite dealing with disasters of their own. Across our Earth we were hit with tragedy, yet we have prevailed." PresidentMan insisted proudly to the crowd gathered in the park some distance away. "Vigils are being held across the globe for the missing and the dead, and our hearts go out to those who lost a son, a daughter, a wife, a father, a husband..."

"...so...what happens now?" Zim asked honestly, scratching his head as he took the ring off his claw, looking down at it and blinking slowly.

"Pools of sorrow, waves of joy, are drifting through my open mind, possessing and caressing me!"

"...I don't know." Gaz admitted quietly.

"Jai gurruuuuuu deeeevaaaaa! Ooommmmmmm..."

"...I don't know either." Dib said, standing up. "Nothing ever totally stays the same. Bigger and better things, onward and upward...we have to keep moving forward..."

Zim sighed. "I hate the uncertainty! Things START! Things STOP! People COME! People GO! There's no PERMANENCY! This is no way to run the world!" He insisted, shaking his head rapidly back and forth.

"Or a cartoon." GIR said suddenly, making them turn their heads as he grinned. "Or, for that matter, a massive crossover universe."

They were all silent as he continued to sing, beaming as brightly as the sun that was rising across the city.

"Nothin's gonna change my world...nothin's gonna change my world..."

"I missed that." Gaz admitted. "That bit of snarky little life examination...a nod and a wink..."
"So did Zim." Zim decided.

"It's morning." Dib spoke as the others stood up with him. "You know what they say about morning. Life's little "reboot" button." He said, a smile spreading across his face as they headed into the city, the song spreading through the air,

"'Nothin's gonna change my world...nothin's gonna change my world...'"

... ... ...

...I live in the world of I-Z.

A strange world. A weird world.

A world of sights that defy imagination, physics and good taste.

"Mr. White said every trucker in the Eastern Section of the Milky Way would be slobbering over my body if I did some pose work for he and his wife's artist studio!" Relationship Sue insisted, putting a hand on her enormous chest and giggling playfully as Feyr sat atop Jormungdr's hooded head, shaking his head back and forth.

"So your brain turned to clam sauce and you said "yes"." He muttered, wondering if the other heads of the Corps had to put up with people like this.

"Chase your dreams, I always say!" The girl chuckled, holding up a bicycle pump and rushing off to a nearby doorway in the hall of the Tallest's palace to join her lady friends, a sign on the front reading "Breast Expansion: Two for One Deal. A loud "POP" issued from inside followed by a horrid screech as Purple's apologetic voice weeded out an excuse.

"If our former Tallest never had problems like this, they SHOULD have!" Feyr insisted, slamming his fist into his palm.

"Come on, we've got to go dismantle the last of the smeeting factories today." Jougmundr said. "I've got some fireworks set up, that always puts a smile on your face!"

"The Tallest's ship is ours, I've got my planet back, our show's number one on Irken Television and my sister's first baby girl is on the way!" Lard Nar told Miyuki as he put a hand on his chest and they strode down the hallways of the "Massive". "I'm feelin' good! I'm feeling-"

"Hopeful." Miyuki finished as Psyche hovered nearby. "Have you picked out a godmother, by chance?"

A world filled with beings of fantastic proportions and powers.

"Dark sweat mingling with the blood and tears. Crime is a giant, a Goliath to be struck down by a hardy David. But never send a man to do the job of a WOMAN!" Dite growled, pointing at the dry erase board she was using as the Red Army sat in their seats, listening intently to her words as
Chulainn held up a set of keys.

"Excuse me whilst I chew your co-boss out a little, ladies." Chulainn requested as politely as he could of his assorted vigilantes. "What are THESE?" He asked, frowning at Dite.

"...nothing."

"They definitely belong to something."

"Fine, fine. Besides the base, I had Trik make a personal special thing. A vehicle."

"...what's it called?" Chulainn asked, the Red Helm's army leaning in as Dite smirked, taking off her helmet.

"The Red Rover."

"That is SO totally-"

"HEEEEYY!!! I LIKE IT." Peech insisted as she rolled in on the futuristic motorcycle, slinging a sack over her back and grinning as Pyrsist sat atop her shoulder. "Me and MY boys caught a few shoplifters. We get 20%, as agreed, right?"

"Remember though...no stealing from children." Dite insisted as Peech nodded firmly. "But Peech, my dear...I think this is gonna be the beginning of a beautiful partnership. Now c'mon." She leapt atop the back of the motorcycle, punching the air. "LET'S BLAST THE LIVING BEJEEBUS OUTTA THE TERRORIST PLANET BALYANIA!"

"WOOHOOOOO!" Peech hooted, the motorcycle racing over a table and through a window, Chulainn chuckling as he bounded after them, Xeil watching from above with Spork and Panyck sitting near her.

"Lookit that. The way she's HOLDING onto her...that kind of thing's disgusting." Panyck mumbled, his singular eye atop his forehead narrowing.

"I dunno." Xeil murmured, taking off her helmet and laying it down thoughtfully on the roof nearby. "...their hands gently touch...a tactile vow of whispered love. Two souls intertwined...growing as one...like the garland now folded over her head...of lilac and baby's breath."

"...that flight of fancy's new, isn't it?" Spork asked, smiling. "I think it's pretty." He complimented.

"Awww, thank you for noticing!" Xeil said sweetly, Panyck fake-gagging in disgust as he held his throat in his sharp bony talons.

*On the streets walk people the likes of which you've never seen before, so strange, so frightening, so unsettling, and yet so fascinating.*

"The world calls out to her, the Heavens call out to her..." Jayd spoke proudly.

"Her PARTNER calls out to her to tell her that she left the oven on!" Maht yelled out from the apartment below the rooftop Tak stood on, Jayd hovering in the air nearby. "Fiyvr and I are not your maids!"
"But she doesn't listen for the call of the Heavens is stronger, and she is...GREEN LANTERN!"
Jayd finished dramatically, Tak clenching her fists in a fighting pose as she leapt off the roof.

"Let's go to work, partner." She chuckled.

Irken cowboys, breast implants, sex changes, freaky hybrids, altered universes, incredible powers
and magic beings the likes of which even GOD had never seen...they call this realm of Invader Zim
home.

"Look at them." Senior whispered to Darth as he stretched out his gloved hands over Irk, and the
plethora of new beings and aliens that now walked the land. A new day was dawning. A new sun
was rising. "It's amazing, Darithil. Amazing. The endless possibilities are stretching out before me.
All of history's been changed. EVERYTHING's been changed. What happens next?"

"I think that's up for us to decide. For once." Darth chuckled slightly.

Senior nodded, turning to Sude as the Seraphi Dragon nodded firmly, the two leaping through the
air.

The passageways to worlds beyond had never been so easy to reach...everything was so clear, a big
white sheet of paper, full of potential.

"It's a magical world." May Nar insisted to Darth as she watched her husband take off. "It's good to
see him exploring again...I just hope he's back by 7." She added with a chuckle, little Nora nuzzling
her mother's chest.

And you know what?...

"This...is what God feels like on a good day." Sude insisted as they flew through the air, making
towards the Western Sky, sights to see, worlds to save, people to help across the multiverse, the
gentle pulse of their new sun brightly illuminating a redeemed world as they flew.

I wouldn't have it any other way.

Ooh, you make me lay down...
Ooh, you make me forget I am here,
Ooh, you make me safe now...
Ooh, you make the faces disappear!

I'm alright, by the way!
Everyone saves the day,
Sometimes I feel it...

Seeeend it up, oh, Send it up now!
Seeeend it up! Send it up to me!
Seeeend it up, oh, Send it uuuuup!

Ooh I feel so close now!
Ooh you're taking me back from where I've been!
Ooh I'm not alone now!
Ooh you rest me up and rush me in!

I'm alright, by the way!
Everyone saves the day,
Sometimes I feel it...

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Seeeend it up!

Send it up to me!

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