

Volume V Summary

They say that nothing truly changes, and the retired hoodlums of the block set out to prove it. Dean Crowe left behind his life of danger and deceit hoping to get by just like everybody else – until a broken young girl falls into his lap. Finding himself dragged in the current turf war, he must decide where the boring yet safe life he's been living is worth sacrificing in order to defend the greater good. Despite the protests of his friends, the retired gangsters must return to a world they were fortunate enough to escape once already.

However not all things are as they seem, and as Dean rushes toward his proposed salvation, all the unanswered issues from his past raise their head searching for blood. He must make amends with his friends, enemies, and self as he struggles to survive a war he has disowned years before, discovering that his purpose in this entire ordeal was more than he could have ever conceived.

1. The Caged Tiger

I don't know how it happened, it just kind of...did. You ever wake up one day, and go out into the world, and you look around and you end up somewhere else? And you look around and you wonder how the fuck you got there. Ever have that happen to you? Maybe. Anyways, how the hell did I get involved in what happened? I don't know, but somehow I ended up with a psycho cursing me off for hours on end in my room. How the hell did she get there, you ask? Well now, that's a good question...

Her name was Dev. She was the leader of the local

gang, or so I imagine. How she ended up in my bed, well, see...I'm not sure. Well, I might be. I should go back and think about it. There was a fight, I remember that much. I'm not in any gangs, I don't care much for them, and I've outgrown the time where I'd care about youth. Wait – once you get out of the teens, life will become real. My father told me that childhood ends when you come to accept and understand the one true fact that is inescapable – you're going to die. So anyways...the fight, there was a fight, naturally. There are always fights outside the shop, always. The Black Dragon's been standing for years; it has stood pain and grief, anger and hate. It's changed hands a few times, but nothing severe. It was constant, one of the few things to remain. The legends and stories still survive, they live with it, and the gangs are proof of that. When the great leaders fell, new ones would step up and take their place. The latest was led by a girl, a girl to take the place of generations of males. Isn't that grand? Now, where was I? Her, bed, yeah, let me explain.

Fight. There was a fight. And she got the life beaten out of her. Now, I was sauntering along minding my own business when I saw the remains of the scene. The rest of her group had left her there; I think there was a betrayal at work here. She was trying to get up and, failing miserably, she collapsed on the ground. Now, I was ready to just keep going when someone came out of absolutely nowhere and took a hold of my shoulder. It was a figure, decked in black from head to toe, no distinguishable facial traits, nothing. And they pointed to the figure in the alley. And I kind of...assumed what they wanted me to do. I helped her up and took her home. Home, that's funny. I'm moving too fast I imagine. Maybe, slightly.

So the phantom came from nowhere and pointed out the fallen soldier, and I picked her up and took her home. Home is where I live, it's a big open place, I live with a roommate who comes and goes, but we'll get into him later. So I carried her; she was all kinds of difficult, punched me a bunch of

times the entire way home. She was a pain in the ass. Yelling and screaming, how I managed to get her back without being arrested, I'm not sure. Come on, it does look suspicious, me, carrying a screaming teenager home who's bleeding and broken...wouldn't you ask questions? Maybe. I had her wrapped in my coat, it was kind of cute, if you stood back, tilted your head...maybe. So I took her home like I was supposed to, laid her down, and left her alone. I locked her in my room – she tore the place apart. Bull in a china shop...

So anyways, that's how we ended up with the kid in the bedroom. My roommate came home, heard the racket in my room, shook his head, and went back outside. I was having a slight breakdown of my own. The kid hasn't slept yet, she won't sit still, she's been in there breaking things for what feels like days, it's only been hours. Hours. She's tearing my life apart in hours. What the hell did I get myself involved in? You know how sometimes something in your mind tells you to do something when common sense tells you not to? It's...illogical, but you do it anyway? That's how things worked. It was raining too. I sat at the window and listened, watched, and time faded away, everything went away. My life four feet away wasn't being torn apart by a violent teenager. She wasn't bleeding and broken. I hadn't forcibly taken her in on a whim. What the hell happened to my life?

One of those fly by moments...life is, you know? It's a series of fly by moments. One right after another, arranged randomly. Maybe...I sulked around the apartment until I found my roommate's pack of cigarettes and lit one up. After a moment of coughing, things shifted into perspective. I never bought my own packs, I'd kind of...well...mooch off of my roommate. The fellow has a name and everything, but we'll talk about him when he comes back. Granted that he does come back...

Time passed, as it tends to, and the noises stopped. I waited awhile longer to be sure, to be positive as fools usually are. When the quiet lasted continuously, I opened the door slowly.

She was curled up on the floor, against the wall, near the door. She'd been trying to break it down or get it open...for hours. The room was a mess; I didn't have time to childproof it before she showed up. Oops. Anyways. So I picked her up and put her in the bed and made sure she was really asleep. Then I started to check her over, count the bleeding slits, the holes, punctures, everything. Took an estimate as to how many bones were broken, cracked, shattered. I wasn't a doctor, but I was educated enough to know that she needed one. My roommate knew a thing or two about fixing people up, but of course, he was missing. He was an old gang mate; we both were involved in the scene ages ago. In another time, another place, another once upon a time. Shit happens, times change, you grow up and out and move along. We didn't move far.

I was in the midst of checking her over when she woke up. And she was on me faster than I could process the thought that she was functional. Isn't that ironic? She grabbed hold of my throat and held with a grip that scared the hell out of me. I just sat there, gasping, fighting. She looked around, back at me, and let go of my throat, not really let go, but loosened her grip.

"Where the hell am I?"

"My apartment..."

"You live here?"

"Yeah, my roommate and me."

"And who the fuck are you?"

"I'm Dean. My roommate's Galat."

She kind of slowed down, let go, looked around more cautiously. The room was unfamiliar to her, as currently, it seemed unfamiliar to me as well. Nevertheless, she was calmer now. Pain will do that to you. So she sat still and kept her

eyes darting from me to the room and back again. You could hear the stress in her chest as she tried to breathe; the function wasn't as it once was. I needed Galat to fix her. I was still piecing things together.

"Why am I here?"

"Someone told me to take you."

"Told you?"

"Well, they didn't talk much...or at all..."

She jumped up from out of the bed and moved for the door; I caught her before she could get through. A door slammed elsewhere – Galat was home. I held her kicking and screaming for a while, calling for Galat. After half of forever, he came in and looked at me, looked at her and shook his head.

"What the hell are you doing?" he screamed over her.

"Don't ask, just fucking help me, will you?"

Between the two of us, we got her pinned to the ground. Galat was able to run off and find something to sedate her. Like I said, he was the doctor, not me. We got her to lie down again and we left her locked in the room. And back to the living room. What the hell have I gotten involved in? My mind is still reeling.

"Where the hell did she come from?"

"The world of the waking, where the hell did you think I got her?"

"Who is she and why is she *here*?"

"I got bored," I went to smile a fake grin, but he grabbed me and threw me against a wall.

"We swore to be neutral, remember?"

"This' different."

"WHY?"

"Elysium told me to take her."

He stopped in his movements; he let go of me and started pacing. Everyone knew the stories, the legends. There were two names that sent chills down your spine when you heard them. Entropy. Elysium. The pair, the indivisible set. For all eternity; like the shop, they were constant. Can you imagine? To be given orders by one of them was beyond all contestations, you did as you were instructed and asked no questions. They were always and forever.

"She needs a proper doctor you know."

"I know...should we get Toryn?"

"Probably."

So out the door we went, upstairs, downstairs, whatever, and we knocked on a door that was logged in our memories but had been locked away since our gang days. We still had old connections, but we only paid visits for very big favors. Knocked on the door, and there she was. She didn't seem to have changed much, same gestures, same expressions, she aged a little I imagine. But still the same old Toryn that she always was. She leaned against the doorframe and looked the two of us over, back and forth. We looked a tad foolish I imagine.

"So where's the fire?"

And we took her back with us and showed her. We didn't have to explain, all you say is "Elysium," and it's as good as done. Toryn was the old crew's doctor, she and Galat, she taught him most of what he knew now. But he wasn't half as gifted with it as she was; she truly was a marvel to watch. She was just that good. Hours passed, maybe it was minutes, and she re-emerged, looking more tired.

“She’ll be sleeping awhile.”

“She’s okay?”

“Well that’s debatable...she fucking bit me...they better have good reason, that one’s more trouble than she’s worth.”

We laughed a bit, even Toryn laughed. She sat down with the two of us awhile and we just talked about old times I guess. It was fun while it lasted. She was great in all types of ways.

“What would you two boys do without me?”

“Hey now, we’re not completely useless!”

She raised an eyebrow, “Oh, you’re not?” And we all laughed and she put on her most desperate expression and mocked how we’d gone running to her for help. She was a scream, why we didn’t hang out with her more, I don’t know.

So there we were, sitting around and wasting time, as we were prone to do, we were pretty good at it too. Years of practice pays off you know. So Toryn stayed awhile and then left us with the sleeping tiger, angry about her new cage. She left us some sedatives and things to keep her...“manageable”. And there we were. How she got a hold of said drugs...well we won’t be discussing that. We had connections; it comes with the territory, usually. Galat wasn’t too thrilled with the new predicament; he got up and went out for another walk. And me? Well, I went to sleep, naturally.

2. Proper Courtesy

Please excuse me; I've forgotten my manners. I should properly introduce myself I imagine. My name is Dean, least; it was the last time I checked. Most people don't really call me by my given name. That's because I don't usually tell them my name.

So they'll call me whatever comes to mind. Usually, it's Havok. Dean or Havok, whatever you see fit to call me, I'll answer. Well, I might, depends on the situation. You need help; I might come running. You want the guy that broke your buddy's arm? He went that way. Back to the point, my name's not all that significant. I'm 21 years old; least I was last time I checked. I have to check on these things a lot lately, never can tell anymore. I don't do much with my life – I work, kind of. I do all kinds of odd jobs, whatever I can find, whatever gets me through the days.

Galat and I have been friends for half of forever, we were gang mates once upon a time. When the leader went missing, the structure fell apart and war broke out. We were "fortunate" enough to survive the mess and move on to have lives. Luck or skill, I'm not sure. Either way, we got out before it got bad. Kids died; kids, that's all we were. To die so young for no purpose, no point; yet they died. The streets ran with blood for weeks as the weak fell and the strong were overtaken and mutiny became the world's bedfellow. Loyalty was a distant memory, a long forgotten idea that screamed betrayal at its' whispering. Next chapter.

So that part of our lives died out and we got our individuality back, a rebirth of sorts, if you will. And we started over again, the gang disbanded mostly and the younger ones took over and remade what we'd destroyed. Hence, Dev. She took over where Cicero and Vince had fallen. She was worthy, in her own sense I imagine, we didn't really keep score. We grow up and out of such games and things.

Streets run by kids, like we were once upon a time. Dev was the latest and greatest model, yet there was no loyalty in her ranks. If I did a little research, I could probably learn why. Her crew and the other main group were always at odds and ends, always messy, never ending. Nothing truly important ever really ends, and as long as it matters to someone, it is, theoretically important. That's my idea of it anyways, perhaps. Maybe I'm just being foolish.

Dev's reputation precedes her, though it was nothing to compare to the greats; Cicero and Vincent's names were permanent in the minds of the weak, in the victimized and social. Dev...where she came from, I'm not sure. But she crawled out of the madness and took control of what remained. How she took hold...I'm not sure of that either. It's like how she ended up in my bed, one of those things you're just not sure of. Anyways, she took charge. I knew the names and faces, the times and places, I'd been there too once upon a time and there wasn't much time between them and me. I just grew out of it, the sense of dying for petty nothing. I learned and adapted to reality. The nemesis in our tale, his name was Marcellus. They were the two gods, the high masters. And each was ruthless in its' methods, Marcellus more so. True, Dev had fought her way to the top, but she retained the simplest human emotions. Marcellus didn't believe in loyalty or trust...how he managed a gang without those, I'm not sure. There's not very much I am sure about...

His name was Cellus actually, Marcellus was too..."proper" and drawn out. What kinds of hippy reject parents name their son, "Marcellus" anyway? Hippies that smoked up a little too much all together...somehow, he became a gang leader though. With a silly name like that, a gang leader. It's funny if you really think about it from a logical standpoint...well, maybe not as funny as I'd like to imagine it was. Once upon a time; did so much change in such a short time? It was...five years or so since dear ole Vince disappeared. What a tragedy, he was so

sorely missed. Cry, cry, tear, tear.

So there was Galat and I. We were pretty good in our time, but like I said, days come and go, and our time became outdated. New faces and places; the cycle continue; the gears still turn. Galat had several talents, he was marksman, medicine man, negotiator; he was the embodiment of the jack-of-all-trades. I was a considerable shot; I was the more rational of the two...but my attention span kept me from being negotiator. In life threatening situations...I tend to go...well, somewhere out to the left and up and three steps back and one more to the right. You know?

Toryn...I knew I almost forgot someone. She was the doctor. Who she learned from and how, nobody knows. Rumor has it that Elysium herself taught Toryn how to stitch people up with string and dull needles. You never can tell. The stories go that Elysium is the best-known doctor this side of eternity, but there's always a catch. The only way she'll come to your side is if you're not breathing anymore, if you understand what I mean? Maybe, we'll pretend for now, it's not all that important, I can go back and do revisions later. Stories and rumors and legends, it's all we have to keep going, it keeps us moving and thinking and from them we get new ones and it never ends. Revisions, life is, a series of revisions to the known and the unknown, a tweak here and there and now it's satisfactory. This doesn't have anything to do with Toryn, but it's kind of relevant. If I figure out why...I'll be sure to let you know.

The child slept the night, or so I'd imagine. I crept into my room at one point to assess the damage. I had obituaries gracing the walls; they were laminated in most cases and hence, were protected. The really important ones were framed and placed delicately. The legendary ones were all together. And in the center, the crowning jewel – Darius and Raine Drake. The double entry, the legends themselves and from them, all other branched. Everyone was there. Lyric and Harvey,

Syrius, Madison and Sketch, Cicero...all the late and great were there. The stories were legend, everybody knew. My wall was covered with legends, my bookshelves held more clues. And if you pieced them all together, you'd still be missing half of forever.

She slept. So Galat and I stayed up the night and talked about whatever came up. He did work too...I don't think it was the most legal of jobs, but I learned at a young age to not ask questions. Better for your health. You'll live longer that way, I promise. Well, I shouldn't make promises like that, it is kind of foolish...dangerous. Then again, everything's dangerous. Housing the leader of a gang is punishable by death in street justice, depending on the case and point. Cellus could have crucified us out of boredom if he damn well wished if he ever found out we were housing his mortal enemy. All we wanted was to remain neutral...but when Death asks a favor of you, you don't put him off until next time.

So we held onto her as we were told. We didn't have instructions detailing how long we were supposed to hold on to her and what we were supposed to do now...so we waited. She calmed down a bit; we'd take turns going in to give her food and things. A couple days of sedatives and we were able to let her out. She was broken still; even without pills and meds she was fairly weak. And still fairly strong...we let her roam around the place to get her bearings. Galat went to touch her or something to get her attention, and she decked him one so quick he was on the ground before he knew he'd been hit. I jumped back and kept a safe distance...Dev wasn't a big kid but she had power to her, power you wouldn't expect. Bombs in small packages, remember? He got up and dusted himself off, nothing broken or hurt, just a little tiny bruise on his pride. But hey, guys are guys, you know? A smaller, younger female just sucker-punched him and sent him sprawling. We heard clapping from the doorway.

"Maybe there's more to that one than meets the eye." Toryn's

eyes were shining; she looked us all over, the two of us, dazed, lost. We were like children to her because of our ignorance. And Dev was one to be respected. Is age nothing anymore?

Toryn crept inside, how long she'd been in the doorway, I'm not sure. My mind's a bit fuzzy sometimes; please bear with me. She sauntered inside the place, careful to keep out of Galat's range. He wasn't too pleased with the situation and it took ever ounce of restraint in me to keep myself from laughing. Toryn moved right up to Dev and sized her up, pacing around, like a predator.

"So, you took his place?"

"His?" was the defiant reply.

Toryn laughed slightly to herself, facing Dev. "Vincent. Tragic isn't it, how he just...disappeared."

Dev never missed a beat, she curled her mouth to match Toryn's sly grin and took the step forward to match the challenge. "Course, absolutely...tragic."

And Toryn gave her a little look and turned to move over to me. She looked me up and down and laughed again. "You going to light that, or is it just for decoration?"

I realized I'd subconsciously taken Galat's pack from him and took one for myself, though I'd yet to light it. My stream of consciousness returned and I lit haphazardly. Toryn just stood with the two of us and we all kind of glared at Dev. Why we did this...hey, it was kind of fun. Maybe we're all just..."kind" of sick. Could go either way you know.

Now, side note – Toryn had a bit of a thing for Vincent. She was his right hand girl; when Elysium wouldn't clean up for him, Toryn was the one to have at your side. When she wanted to be, she could be cold and cruel, we'd been...fortunate enough

to see it firsthand on occasion. When dear Vincent vanished and the fights broke out, we figured that Toryn would step up and take her rightful place on top. Somehow, that plan went out the window. If my memory serves correctly, Toryn was lured away and left town for a business trip to help family, help they didn't need...sound set up to you? So she comes back and guess what? You got it, Dev's in charge of the old crew, Galat and I bailed, and most of Toryn's loyal followers went over to Marcellus. Everything you ever knew, gone. Poof. So you could say that she was a tad bit bitter of the situation at first. Dev owed her life to Toryn, can you imagine? Think about it..

Toryn smirked and smiled and sauntered away as stealthily as she'd entered. On her way out the door, we heard her whisper, "Tell them all she won't be back."

And she was gone. Toryn did bizarre things like that a lot, we knew to expect it. Dev was standing firm, straight and tall...and knowing all the broken bones and things wrong with her, standing like that must have hurt. She turned and walked away and found somewhere else to sulk. Toryn was usually on our side, but every once in awhile, you leave her alone to her own devices and she'd cause all kinds of trouble. And that she did. I'm getting ahead of myself.

The days kind of dragged by, Dev was improving ever so slightly. Toryn would drop in and check on everything, and then she'd brief Galat on what to keep a watch over. After the first few days, she stopped tearing things apart and just gave up fighting us off. In reality, she was in too much pain to deal with us and we were trying to help – you don't just throw something like that out the window. You can kill with good intentions, but we had no such motive. We were asked to do a favor and the perks of doing a favor for someone like that are highly beneficial to your well-being. Dev was a handful in her own sense, but she was tolerable. When we let her out of the room, I went in to put my life back together. It wasn't much of a life, just a collection of stories. Stories are all we

have.

“You have all of them?”

She was standing in the doorway, watching me, pointing to the design of obituaries. I nodded half-heartedly. I knew I had to be missing chapters, but I had the major players. That’s all that matters, to me anyway. She came closer and looked at the careful net of names, the stories and times and places, the names and faces, and she looked from them to me.

“Where does yours go?”

And I stopped in my tracks, my mind moved backwards, the gears grinding together. I didn’t belong in the chain, I was a has been, a never was. I was just a lackey in my time and now I’m just the collector of misery. I collect the records, the methods and madness and record the insanity for the world to observe. The obituaries stretch back to the beginning, to deaths before my time, I managed to get them anyway. Harvey’s is there, Harvey, the legend of decades before. Dev belonged in the chain, as Cellus did, they were leaders, they would be legends, they already were. All the leaders had stories of ruthlessness and cunning. They were all known for something. I was just the timekeeper.

She kept staring at me and seeing I wouldn’t answer, she kind of smiled a evil grin and sauntered out. I yelled after her as she went, “What’s Dev short for?” She came back.

“What do you think?”

“I don’t know, hence why I asked you.”

“Maybe.” And she left the room. I still stood there, staring at the names, the places, the legends. Once upon a times but no happily ever after. Fairy tales and bedtime stories and make believe written in blood and pain. Pain winding through years, engrossing lives and deaths and everything in between

and it's reduced to names on a wall, names and times and places and faces. Change the wall color and it's still a wall, it's still real. Reduce them to less and they're still people, they are still pain.

3. Family Values

I went for walks from time to time, leaving the tiger home alone. She was still wounded, it'd been a few days; she would be out of commission a good long while. Whoever did their job, did it well. I prayed that someone would claim her, holding her was getting more and more difficult the stronger she got. But she also was a tad bit less...violent as time passed. She came to grips with the reality of the fact that she had nowhere to go and we were only doing a favor. I could risk the displeasure of the Endless and throw her out into the street. It would have been that simple, that nonchalant, just poof, you're done. But so it goes.

I walked around and found groups of kids here and there, the Dragon was all on its' own, the group that protected it long gone. Pike and Syn were the couple to run it, they still stopped in, but they'd handed over absolute control to the Drakes' children, Payge and Set. Set's name was really Dante, but they all called him Set anyway. Dante was too...proper, kind of like Marcellus. Legends in flesh and blood; everybody knew the stories, everyone knew the tragedy and how it'd ended up, but nobody asked questions. Out of respect to the lost. The shop had pictures everywhere of the fallen soldiers, the lost friends and family. I was going nowhere when a figure came around and took me by the arm. Now, I know the names and vaguely know the faces, it's been a while.

“Can I bother you for the time, sir?” The kid had his eyes lowered to the ground, a dark look to him, you could feel pain from him, he emanated around his shape. I took a step back and looked the frame up and down, lost under a long coat and dark colors. I knew without knowing.

“The time sir, do you have it?”

“All we have is time, kid.”

“I’m looking for my sister.”

“What does time have to do with her?”

“She’s running out of it.”

“Is she?”

“Have you seen her, sir? Her name’s Dev.”

“Can’t say that I have.”

“Are you absolutely certain? I can usually find her here and she’s been missing for days, I’m terribly worried, sir.”

“Listen, I haven’t heard of her, I can’t help you,” and I walked away. I took about two steps when I heard my steps being repeated. I stopped and they stopped. I turned around and the boy was still there. He wasn’t much of a boy though, he was my age almost, somewhere between Dev and I. I knew without knowing.

“You’re Marcellus, aren’t you?”

He smiled a carefree, jaunty little grin. “Now, whatever makes you say a thing like that?”

I looked him over, he had all the right qualities, but it couldn’t be, the real Marcellus wouldn’t be so foolish to get so close. I took a few steps closer until we were toe to toe. I grabbed him by the throat and dragged him into the alley and

held him against the wall. I stared deep into his eyes, eyes that, for a moment, reflected fear. I knew them, in an instant, that this was an imposter.

“Put him down.”

I turned my attention elsewhere, to a similarly clad boy, darker, more menacing with a voice more solid than the first. I lowered my victim to the ground and watched the approaching form. He came up to us, clapped his fellow on the back as he struggled to breathe, and faced me.

“I am Marcellus, sir.”

“What kind of games are these?”

“I’m looking for my sister.”

“That’s impossible.”

“It is, sir? I dare to question why.”

“You are the leader of the opposing gang. You ordered the attack on the group that protected the Dragon. You destroyed it from within itself and left the leader dying in the street.”

“But she didn’t die.”

“How do you know that?”

“You’re too defensive.”

“What?”

He shrugged his shoulders and started circling me. “If she were already dead, you wouldn’t be so worked up about what happened. I want her back.”

“You don’t deserve her back.”

“It doesn’t matter what anybody deserves, sir. She is my

charge and I want her back.”

“She’s no one’s charge but her own. I won’t help you.”

He looked down at the ground and looked up at me before replying softly, “So be it.” He looked at the kid still standing there, waiting for direction. “Lyre, go home.”

And we were alone. Cellus stood there, calmly, somberly, looking around slowly.

“You know, I’d hate to have to do anything rash to you sir, you needn’t be involved in this. It’s wiser to just...let go.”

“I have a duty I must heed.”

“Oh? To who? You have no allegiance, you are loyal only to the past.”

“The Endless.”

“They have no right to intervene, no one’s died here.”

“Are you so certain?”

And Marcellus staggered. His calm, solid speech faltered and he found himself lost. He stood there and was lost for words. I nodded to him and departed, as I was inclined to do. And he still stood there as I left.

“Hey!” he shouted as I walked away. I didn’t even turn back to face him.

“Yeah?”

“Bang. You’re dead.”

I turned around for half a second and saw the gun leveled at me. Mind – stop. Thoughts – cease. Heart – on hold. Sanity? Standing by. Oxygen on line one, movement’s holding on line two. But he never fired. He stood there and waited for it, for

the last second cringe, the last minute scream, anything. He pulled the trigger and the shot sailed over my shoulder, inches from my neck. And I didn't falter. He sauntered over to me.

"Now that's impressive. Too bad you quit before things got fun."

"Fun? Kids dying for nothing is fun?"

"Whoever said it was for nothing?"

"So what was it for?"

"Chaos. For Entropy. To go to Elysium. The Endless, remember?"

"How could I ever forget?"

"You can't, that's right, it's your job to remember everything. How's that working out for you?"

"Wonderful."

"Course it is."

"Yup."

"You ever get tired of it, let me know."

"Why?"

"Don't forget," and he walked away. The words' echo still rang in my mind as all functions came back online. Breathing, thinking, moving, it's all a go. And we're back.

I went home slightly shaken, nothing serious. Nothing in life really is serious, if you break it down to its' actual frame. Dev was pacing around smoking...she must have hijacked some from Galat. I searched around, nervously looking for one. I stopped when I was toe to toe with her; she was holding one out for me, which I took gladly. I lit up haphazardly, realizing only then that I was shaking. I sat down nervously and watched Dev

pace around. Watching her pace satisfied my urge for movement, I found I was too tired to care anyway. I laid back and stretched out on the couch, staring at the ceiling. I felt dizzy, lost, misplaced...I don't know what's happened to me.

"You met him didn't you?" She'd stopped pacing and stood a little ways away, not too close, not too far. I nodded subtly.

"He does that to everyone."

"That why you left him?"

She wasn't looking at me. "I didn't leave him, I left the family."

"Care to explain?"

"Not particularly."

"I didn't think so, but it was worth a shot."

"That'd probably help right about now."

"What?"

"A shot."

"You can't drink."

"Says who?"

And I went to reply but knew better. I looked at her carefully, she could pass as 21, she was barely shy I imagine. I talk about her and I like there was a huge age gap but it was only a couple of years, if that. If we went to the right place, we could manage. I knew the guy that was the bartender at one of our favorite haunts. It wasn't far from the Dragon, it was an old gang bar. I got up and grabbed my coat, put my arm around her shoulder and moved to the door.

"If we can't stop the pain, what say we drown it?"

4. Living in Yesterday

I think the bar was called the Drowning Raven, but most of the drunks called it simply, the Drown. The bartender was another old acquaintance, Galat and I would come in frequently to see him, he ran the place mostly on his own; the top waitress was his little sister. Hadrien and Morgan. He made her work there, it didn't suit her, but he wanted to be able to keep a close eye on her. He was older than us, she was my age. Her and I had a thing, once upon a time. To say the least, it didn't work out well. Bad times, all kinds of trouble, I don't know, it's kind of complicated to say the least. Somehow, Hadrien and I had kept connections and made ends meet. Another kid from the old gang hung out here, Ashe, he worked at the Dragon now. Him and Dyre were in the bar a lot. None of us went far, tragic huh?

We went to the back somewhere and sat down. Ashe was sitting at a table not too far away, talking with Dyre awhile. I think they were brothers actually, Dyre never was into the gang drama; he had a steady job, a level head. He had gone through hard times, I seem to remember them coming from a large family. A lot of tragedy due to gangs; Dyre sided with art. Ashe and him kept in touch though. There's a story about Ashe getting into trouble and Dyre bailed him out. You need all kinds of influence for something like that. The end result, they both end up at the Dragon. Like I said, it's a story. It's a possibility, a maybe. We'll see.

We sat and Morgan came over to get our order, which we gave calmly. She looked from me to Dev and back again. You could see the questioning look shining in her eyes, hidden behind pain. She didn't belong here; where she belonged, I don't know. Hadrien kept her on a short leash, if

it got any shorter – he'd choke her with it. That's their drama though; we all have our own little tragedies. I wanted to be safely out of harm's way when it came. But Fate stared me in the face, emotion lost, expression distant. Morgan came and went, pain emanated from her too. She had better talents, this job was below her. I could feel Hadrien's eyes following my own, an inescapable feeling of impending doom.

"Why didn't you tell me that he's your brother?"

"Why does it matter?"

"It doesn't."

"Point and match."

"Don't you mean game and point?"

"There are no games anymore. All prices paid in blood. All bets made in flesh."

"Maybe."

"Definitely."

"You sure?"

"Positive. I'd bet my life on it."

"That's a fool's bargain."

"Then call me a fool."

"Perhaps."

Drinkers don't need small talk or chitchat. Alcohol heals all wounds, what can't be mended can always drown. Ironic but true. The Endless, Elysium and Entropy, dropped this misfit in my lap, what was I supposed to do with her? For now, I'd deal with her.

Hadrien wandered over eventually, looking the two of us over.

He stood at my side, signaling that I get up to talk to him. I rose politely and stepped off to one side.

"I don't want no trouble, but that's a gang leader. I can't vouch for sanctuary here."

"We didn't expect you to."

"And she's not legal to drink."

"Legal? Johnny Law break you? Come on, we weren't legal either."

"Once upon a time."

"Wasn't all that long ago."

He shook his head, "No, maybe not. Still, you're asking for trouble."

"Always Hadrien, always and forever."

"Any trouble comes up, you take it outside, understand?"

"Course, have I ever done you wrong?"

"There's always a first time."

We laughed a bit and parted ways as old friends, which we were. Long ago, which was only half a decade. Time flies, right? Dev was behaving, whether it was out of respect or the charms of the alcohol, I'm not sure. But she was all types of agreeable. Hence, I instigated.

"How did the two of you end up in opposing gangs?"

"Sibling rivalry."

"No, explain."

"Vince disappears, Toryn gets drawn away, Marcellus was supposed to be next in line. Everyone knew that Cellus and

Vince had rivalry, hence he was skipped. Feeling betrayed, he left the gang with accusations of betrayal screaming at his back. As my older brother and only blood family, he demanded that I follow. I refused.”

“So he tears what should have been his out from under you?”

“That’s half of it.”

“What’s the other half?”

“The body-count so far.”

“Minus one; he missed you.”

“He didn’t intend to kill me.”

“No? Could have fooled me.”

“He’s good at that.”

“What?”

“Fooling people. Years of practice. He’s mastered the art of persuasion.”

“Good for him.”

The atmosphere was everything you’d expect in a bar. Ashe and Dyre were still there. They’d stay for awhile, they seldom ever had time to spend together. They were all they had left. Street demons usually don’t have families; it’s a package deal. Your only family is the band of brothers...and sisters, that you live and die with. They are loyalty. They are trust and honor. Everything.

Not gangs or hoodlums. Not freaks or outcasts.

Street demons.

Catchy huh?

I might be slightly insane, only slightly. I sat back and forgot where I was and why, the smoke faded away. And I was anywhere I wanted to be, whenever I wanted to be there. All I had to do was process the thought, the idea and poof...there you are. Maybe I need more sleep, then again, there was a lunatic sleeping in my bed, well, not yet. Return to the world of the waking, blink, think. There we go.

We rose to leave, Hadrien and Morgan acknowledged our departure. A figure crept in as we stepped out the door, movement – pause. Stay, breathe, countdown to catastrophe. In five, four...blink, three. Marcellus stood barely a foot in front of me. I pushed Dev behind me. Two. Crouch down, get out of the way. Hadrien set in motion. One. Door opens again. Bang. You're dead. But you're still breathing. Cellus stood motionless, I saw the legendary shapes in the doorway – the Endless. I was okay, Dev was alive. Morgan was down. Marcellus moved to the Endless, who parted and let him leave. Elysium moved to the hysterical Hadrien and took Morgan. The girl was still breathing – Elysium is the best doctor this side of eternity. Entropy moved to me, pulled me away.

“A war's coming. I want you to keep her alive until then.”

“Why me?”

“You are the timekeeper. You've been on the sidelines. Experience the pain you record. Bear witness to the madness you cherish.”

“Been there, done that.”

“No, you ran before. Now – you'll stay the duration.”

“I'm not a babysitter.”

“Consider it repaying old debts, Havok.” He turned his back to leave.

“I owe you nothing! If anything, you owe me. Give me back my

life!" I screamed.

He turned in the doorway, "It was never yours to begin with. I'll be seeing you," he whispered. "Havok." And they both left, Hadrien and Morgan too. I put my arm around the slightly intoxicated/slightly shaking Dev and headed home. There, we slept. Everything turned black.

Wake up, it's bright, daylight. New day.

Soft bed, check the time.

There's a girl with me...where'd she come from?

Headache. That's Dev. Gears move forward again. Good morning Dev.

What I think happened was we got back to the apartment and passed out in my room on my bed. I woke up to her curled up in my arms. Figures. My mind stalled, I kept turning the key, but no response. Oh well. I stayed there until Dev moved, she stretched slowly, looked around and rolled over. Good night Dev. I got up and padded around quietly. I found Galat in the kitchen. He handed me a cup of coffee and sat down. I sat down with him. Headache.

"I heard what happened."

"Sorry?"

"Morgan's alive. I saw her this morning." I realized he was still dressed.

"Sorry?"

"That was pretty irresponsible Dean, taking her out like that."

"I'm sorry."

He slammed his fists on the tables, the cups jumped. "Sorry

won't fucking cut it. You're supposed to be the rational one. God damn it, what were you thinking?"

"I wasn't...thinking."

"Christ Dean..."

"Havok."

"Excuse me? Hell no, that's a dead gang name. Hell no..."

"I have to."

"You're hijacking our stables lives for...?"

"The Endless."

"Christ. And that makes it better. Dean, we got *out*. You can't go back."

"Maybe."

"If I didn't love you like a brother, I'd beat the hell out of you until you wised up, and you fucking know it."

"You could beat me up?"

"Shut up Dean."

"Havok."

"Fuck off."

"You could beat me?"

"I could try."

And I merely laughed in reply.

And that was that. We were better than brothers, we could curse each other off up and down the streets for days on end and still be buddies. Years of rehearsal, half of forever practicing. Might have finally mastered the technique.

A side note about Marcellus. He had the ruthless means to be a leader, the cunning in his mind and methods, but ultimately, poor people skills. According to legend, Cicero was highly influential, hence his power – manipulation is essential. According to fact, Vincent was the same way. To maintain that much power, you needed good communication skills. Dev was blessed with the power of persuasion and Marcellus had the raw power. Funny how things like this always seem to be hereditary. She was dark and foreboding, but Marcellus was only dark, not quite charming. Just felt like you should know that.

A war would come; it would have to. Dev wasn't healing overnight, her success rate was low to start with. I was Havok again, push a button, here I am. Havok, the name that blessed my more reckless former self. I'm not schizophrenic, I just give my past a name to separate it more easily from the present. It makes some semblance of sense to me.

I think I was still at the table with the coffee cup when Dev emerged. She sat down, got caffeine for herself along the way, and...silence. What was there to say? A knock on the door scattered my thoughts. Galat opened it; I heard voices, a half-thud and Hadrien came rushing into the room. I rose to meet him and found myself on the floor. My jaw ached.

“Get up, you son of a bitch, get up!”

“Now what?”

“She's dead. You bastard.”

Click. Mind – shut down. Sanity breakdown, closed for repairs. Please try again.

“What?”

“You heard me. Dead. They killed her.” He was bleeding, there was a fight. “They got in, screwed up her meds, I tried to

stop them, too late..." and his voice gave out. He collapsed into the chair, crying uncontrollably. This is the beginning of the end.

To get moving again. Welcome to war. Dedicated to Morgan and the suffering that she'd no longer endure. Forever.

Told you she didn't belong there. Another fatal "oops," is anybody keeping score?

My name is Havok.

And it's wonderful to be back. Absolutely fucking great.

5. Rebuilding Foundation

My name is Havok. I'm 21 years old and I quit gangs long ago.

As an only child with no family, quitting left me with only myself to depend on. I clung to my connections and they got me through. I run odd jobs, mostly illegal, to keep myself stable. Galat's saved me from myself more times than I can recall. And I'm the good one. I'm the rational one. I quit because I had nothing to lose, yet I had everything.

And now I'm back. It's an old game but the rules never change. They remain constant, always and forever. Street justice will never die; if it ever does, I want to go with it.

The beginning of a cycle, a never-ending cycle where one falls and is replaced. A war was on its' way, I say let's saddle the horses. Morgan's death took the wrench out from between the gears, we're back and fully operational, maybe slightly improved. There would be a funeral to attend of course, out of respect. Control killed her, poor kid, she was something else. I'm not sure what she was, but she was damn

good at it. She was my age – I'd known her for years. Reality check. Cellus went in there with no intention of killing Dev, she was right in front of him. He wanted innocent blood; he was proving a point. He achieved his purpose.

Plan of action – retaliate. Why? This act of circumstance was becoming personal. I quit being a street demon once upon a time; I guess there really is no rest for the wicked. No such thing as retirement for guys like me. Only two ways out – the cage or the grave. Sometimes you could marry out of it. Sometimes. That required respect, honor, loyalty – Love. The opportunity did more than pass me by, it ran me over a few times first. That's life. Back to constructive thought, or, in this case, destructive. To Toryn we go.

I knocked on the door as firmly as I could, trying for those good solid knocks that sound determined. I might be putting too much thought into something theoretically simple. She opened the door while I was still debating whether my knock was right.

“Can I help you?”

“Um, hi Toryn.”

“Blow something up downstairs? Galat on fire? C'mon, what's wrong?”

“Oh, yeah, can I come in?”

She looked surprised but stood aside anyway to let me pass. I don't remember if I'd ever been here before, it seemed new and different anyway. I think this' my first trip inside. I wandered around recklessly. Toryn gestured haphazardly and I sat.

“Now, what's the catastrophe? Should I be sitting for this one?”

“Morgan's dead.”

“Ah hell, I’m sorry Dean.”

“Havok.”

“Excuse me?”

“My name is Havok. Marcellus killed her. I was there.” I’d managed to answer all of her questions before she could ask them. She jumped out of her chair and started pacing. I jumped up with her to hide the fact that her sudden movement unnerved me.

“Dean, no, hell no, it’s done.”

“Havok.”

“Havok is dead!”

“Since when?”

“Since we left, we agreed, remember? It was done, all of it.”

Somehow I found myself facing her, standing close enough to see the truth in her eyes. She grabbed hold of my shoulders and shook me.

“No! Havok is dead!”

And I had no reply. She was beyond frustration, I could slightly understand why. But Havok never *really* died, he was just...put to rest temporarily. I’d changed and destroyed my former self for my own protection. For everyone’s own protection. I screwed up once upon a time but I straightened out. But it was too late. Attention span – zip.

I hurt Toryn once upon a time and from it we both changed. She got stronger as I got softer. Law of conservation of matter – cannot be created or destroyed. I lost, she gained, or vice versa. Havok was just another forgotten legend. Another name, another time and place. He didn’t belong. I’m not a schizo, it’s just easier to explain my past if I give it a name and a

personality. Makes sense to me...sometimes.

Back to reality. Toryn collapsed back into the chair.

"Why?" She whispered to me, staring at the ground.

No response.

"For who? Her? Dev? The Endless? Yourself?"

Silence.

She jumped up, fists raised, "God damn it, answer me! Dean!"

I was tired of standing, hence – I sat. She gave up and sat with me.

"I could really use your support here." No eye contact.

"Support with what?"

"Rebuilding the gang." No eye contact.

"Are you insane?"

"Probably." No eye contact.

"Don't you remember last time?"

"We need your help." Eye contact. "Toryn, please, I need you."

"We? Who else?"

"Whoever else is foolish enough to do it again."

"So we have no recruits yet?"

"Um, maybe?"

And silence. Yet again...maybe. It is always silent, that's all anything and everything is reduced to. I could be mistaken, which I usually tend to be. Toryn was zoning, I was somewhere else also. I'm very seldom where I'm supposed to be. Assuming

that there's a "supposed to be;" there might be, sometimes. I sometimes feel like I'm living more than one life at the same time. Not a schizophrenic type of existence, just that when I zone out, I go somewhere continuous. Maybe I'm just slightly delusional. Only slightly.

"We need a proper plan."

"Oh, yeah, plans...we need people first, right?"

"Have you put this past Galat yet?"

"Waiting."

"What for?"

"Good question..."

"Well, I sure as hell thought so at the time."

"That's funny."

"Dean?"

"Maybe it's not that funny."

"Dean..."

"Or maybe it's not funny at all."

"Havok!"

"Yes?"

"Shut up."

"Oh, sure."

"Now, let's get started."

"So you're in?"

"Let you go wandering around looking for trouble alone? You'll

need someone to hold your hand to get you across the street.”

Sigh. “Thanks Toryn.” She really knew how to wound a guy. She merely smiled.

“No problem kid.”

“Kid?”

“Act your age and we’ll use a proper name to summon you.”

“Oh, I’m sorry...”

“What for?”

“Not remembering.”

“It’s not your fault. We gave you a lot of reasons to forget.”

“We?”

“I.”

“Oh.”

Silence. Just think, all of my conversations are like that. Zero attention span, everything comes out quick, pointed and precise. Usually, I feel like I have to explain what’s on my mind in as many small words as possible as quickly as possible or else...poof, look at the pretty colors. It’s like being stoned 24/7 uncontrollably and completely at random. Maybe it can’t be explained in words.

We got up after talking senselessly for a bit and relocated downstairs. Galat was reading peacefully, Dev stood smoking at the window. This might be rough. I moved to the table and sat across from Galat. He looked over the book at me, back down, up again at Toryn, back to the book.

“Hey Toryn.” He muttered her name, careful to pay no mind to me.

“Can I talk to you?” I questioned delicately. Galat glanced at me, at the two girls, and he put the book down and rose slightly, leaning over to me.

“Talk about what? The wake’s tomorrow and the next day.”

Click; we have a glitch in the system. Please stand by...

“We’re rebuilding the gang.”

His eyes narrowed, he stood straight, shoulders leveled. “We? What gang?”

“Yes, we. Toryn and I for start. We’re rebuilding Dev’s gang with our strength.”

That got Dev’s attention, she wandered over and stood with Toryn on the sidelines.

“Any way you guys could run these things by me before we start throwing my name around? I’d be highly appreciative. Thanks fellas.” Dev’s voice shattered the silence suddenly. Galat turned to glare at her. She just squared off and glared back.

“Why? Dean, think about your actions.”

“Havok.”

“God damn it, no!” Galat’s tone turned to desperation. He moved person to person, looking for something, anyone to support him. Toryn shook her head to acknowledge that she understood his frustration but was ultimately powerless. Dev just stood there, stone solid, dead to emotion. He’d thrown his fists down on the table; he moved to the chair and sat.

“Don’t you remember?”

“Are you in?” I whispered.

“You know I’d follow you to Hell and back just so you won’t be alone.”

“So will you? Follow me to Hell?”

“Any plans for a return trip?”

“One thing at a time.”

“Figures,” he sighed to himself.

“So boys, what next?” Toryn clapped her hands together to get our attention – we looked at her calmly. We’d need more muscle; we were stereo-typically too old for this game, hence why it might just work. We had experience on our side. We’d build up our defenses and set the war off early. Dev still had resources, we decided to go find Ashe.

Back to the bar. All this in one day. Missing – to the Dragon. We’d ask Dyre where he was. Toryn and I did this, we left Dev with Galat, he’d keep watch over her until we got back. Hopefully.

The Black Dragon – center of all things bizarre, it was the sun; all stories revolved around it. Dyre would be in the back, as per usual. He was the kind of artist available by request only and even then, your request had to be worth his time. Very selective, but with the skill he possessed, he had every right to be. He was curled up in the back, smoking quietly – if I didn’t know better, I’d say that he was asleep. We questioned Ashe’s location. He looked at us carefully, top to bottom, then back to the smoke. He couldn’t be bothered with knowing where his fool of a brother was. Nevertheless, we kept pushing. Dyre was a master of his art, he kept in step with us perfectly. Years of practice. Then Toryn decided to take charge.

If I hadn’t been there, I wouldn’t have believed that it really happened. She sauntered over to him slowly, walking her careful diagonal steps, glaring at Dyre, whom sat before her. She stopped right in front of him.

“Where is he? Dyre, I know that you know. Stop wasting our time.”

“I don’t help street demons.”

“Aw, now dear Dyre, do I look like a street demon?” Toryn put on her most innocent smile and kind of turned. Receiving no response, she sat herself in Dyre’s lap, I think the word would be “straddling.” You’d have to be there. The look of surprise on his face was priceless. A few soft words and general discomfort later and we had a place. With a quick kiss on the cheek, Toryn jumped up and left the shop without another word. Dyre was bright red.

So we went where the wind would carry us. Toryn carefully leading the way. I knew better than to ask foolish questions, especially after our little scene in the Dragon. It’s funny how girls can get away with things like that. For a guy, it’s sexual harassment to do something like that. When a girl does it, it’s entertainment. The world is a very sick place sometimes. Fuck sometimes, all the time, dysfunctional 24/7. Insane, in-fucking-sane. And we’re better now, that was my pointless rant of the week. Maybe, we’ll have to see how the week goes. Can never be too sure, no such thing as a fair bet or a definite chance. Oh well.

Finding a gang member is a pain in the ass, you’re looking for a needle that doesn’t want to be found, lost in one of the biggest haystacks in the world. A few hours later, we had Ashe. He was more than cooperative by the time we were finished with him, practically falling all over himself to help us. A little motivation never hurt anybody...too much. He’d survive; he had as much of a chance as any of us. All anybody ever had was chance. We had the beginnings of a structure, we walked home with Ashe in tow.

Back to the Dragon, Dyre stood waiting outside. Smoking, as per usual, I don’t recall ever seeing him without the usual

cloud of smoke. Regardless, he seemed to be waiting. Dyre was dead to the world at most times, maybe he'd been sleeping for years. That's silly, then again, most true things in life are. Back to Reality with a pit stop in Delirium to refuel. Dyre stepped out to get our attention; assuming that he wanted Ashe, Toryn and I kept moving. He reached out and grabbed my arm.

"What's going on?"

"Nothing, how are you?"

"Don't give me a story, I want the truth!"

"What truth?"

You could feel the tension in the air, the frustration present on his face. He was still holding tight to my arm. His eyes narrowed.

"This' a happy little reunion of misfits. What's the occasion?"

"Dyre, be rational."

Thud. Blink and you would have missed it. The ground was an unpleasant surprise; I got to my hands and knees slowly. My blood shone up at me from the pavement. That son of a bitch hit me! It might be contagious. I think the bruises are working against me. Maybe. I got up nonetheless to face him.

And again, the hard surface of the ground. I don't think I'm learning fast enough for him. Dyre knelt down to meet my eye level as I tried groggily to get to my feet. I was spitting blood out to try to speak.

"Now, let's try this one more time. You know something, I want to know what the gangs are up to. The truth Dean, now."

"Havok."

“Wrong answer.” And I find myself on my back. This was the third hit I’d taken so far. Dyre got on the ground and put his knee to my throat, I can’t move, breathe; think. Toryn was floating around somewhere aimlessly, she stepped in now to try and stop Dyre. Three hits later and she wakes up. Dyre shook her off anyway; I began to black out. I heard Ashe’s voice. And Dyre let go. Oxygen came back slowly, things made more sense. It took awhile, but I managed to get to my feet. Ashe and Dyre were talking hurriedly. Toryn helped steady me out. Dyre swung a punch at Ashe, connected, and faced us. Ashe straightened up and they both came over, Dyre’s hand placed firmly on his brother’s shoulder.

“This is all I’ve got left. I’d die for him. I tried to break him of this bad habit but his loyalty remains. You want him, I’m coming along.”

Toryn spoke for us and we had two recruits instead of one volunteer. Well, accidents happen. We decided to go back home. Home. That’s a funny concept. Maybe just to me...but think about it. Nowhere is secure anymore, nothing is safe from corruption. People especially; darkness lurks around every bend. I might be thinking too much, I do that sometimes when there’s nothing better to do. Planning our next move would probably be a more meaningful use of my time. Perhaps.

Galat and Dev were sitting at the table waiting for us to return. We’d still need weapons. We needed Hadrien. After the events in the bar, whether we were welcome back or not, I’m not sure. For vengeance, he’d probably join. To match his sister’s blood with that of her killer...he’d probably sign up. Probably, as in – maybe. As in – not a definite answer. Then again, nothing’s definite. Everyone sat down, smoked, whatever. Tension; this was a misguided alliance, blood boiled silently yet nothing got out. Pride went on the top shelf, all the way to the left. Now, stay.

“Plan?” Galat’s voice was naturally sarcastic; his point

prevailed regardless. We needed organization; our haphazard little crew was full of misdirection. And a mistake big enough could be fatal. We sat there for days, conspiring. Then, hope knocked on our door – Hadrien came to us.

“What’re you idiots up to?” His voice was stern, demanding, like a father who just walked in on his children lighting up for the first time. Coincidentally, smoke was everywhere. Hadrien might have been the oldest, between him and Dyre – it was close. In gangs, most of everything is close. He let himself in, sitting down at the head of the table.

“Well now, you all don’t think you’d throw a party without me, do you?”

“Course not, Gramps,” I muttered. His attention turned to me.

“So is it really true? Has Havok returned? Tell me boy, what you’ve unleashed.”

“Yes, Havok has returned.” You could hear Toryn and Galat shift uncomfortably.

“Well then, I imagine I want to play. But trust me,” he paused and turned to face Toryn, “If he steps out of place, I’ll send Havok back to wherever he came from. Just like before.”

And we had an agreement, we had a mutual understanding. Now we needed a plan of action, I kept my attention locked on Dev.

“I say we kill the spineless son of a bitch,” Hadrien announced. Dev got up and walked away early on in the conversation. I could understand. We were plotting how to kill her brother. We would take away the only connection she had left. Then again, he had torn her gang apart from underneath. He’d tried to kill her. Isn’t family grand? There were conflicting interests at heart here. Whoever had the stronger will would succeed. So, who would it be? I’m really not the gambling type.

“We need organization,” Dev whispered.

“No? Really? Damn, where would we be without you?” Hadrien snapped back.

Planning commenced. Hadrien would provide weapons and we would provide bodies. This was merely the prologue to something much bigger. Every end must begin somewhere. This was preparation, loading the bullet to answer the first shot. Deciding where to deal the retaliating blow. Unleashing madness; there would be a war and the gods would cry as they felt our misery. They would bend and adhere to our demands. And we would be kings. We would take charge and streets would be as they were meant to be. One gang per area. We would continue the tradition of honor and improve on its' faults. We'd cover the cracks and glory would be ours. Why? Because this is how legends are made.

One drop of blood at a time.

We would go to associates of Cellus and tear them to pieces. Slowly moving inward until we got to family. Then the real fun would begin. Once you get on the inside, you slowly work your way out. We needed someone on the inside. Someone nobody knew. Someone they wouldn't suspect. All eyes turned to Dyre. He protested, naturally. Think about it.

Dev was out for obvious reasons. Ashe was part of her gang, common knowledge. I was known to have her; hence Galat and Toryn were risky as well. Dyre was known to hate gangs; his sudden change of heart might seem suspicious, but he's talented enough to play it off just right. He had the right amount of “Fuck you,” in his voice and general character. No fear. He could do it, we only had Hadrien left, and he obviously didn't qualify. He would be the man behind the curtain. And the rest of us were merely pawns, puppets, actors – shadows of reality. This should be a scream.

I am the world's bastard child.

Then again, aren't we all?

Plans set into motion, we all began to take our places. Dyre would be behind enemy lines, he would take the hits. And somehow, it would work.

Sleep is part of the agenda, we all slept scattered around the apartment. Bad times do good things sometimes, this was not one of those times. We were good people once upon a time, just waiting around to grow old and die.

Instead we'd live young and die trying. Things move too quick to be taken for granted.

Welcome to madness. Welcome to mayhem. We might be taking a trip to the past along the way, so keep your bags packed.

Locked and loaded. Remember kids –

My name is Havok.

6. Setting the Stage

Now, where were we? Nowhere, if I remember correctly, which I seldom ever do. I'm awake, it seems that everyone else is sleeping. So I walk around, catch a smoke, you know, kill time. Toryn was wandering around as well, she took a smoke from the pack on the table that we'd all been sharing and joined me at the window.

“Are you sure you can do it this time, you know, keep it under control?”

“I don't know what you're talking about.”

“No, of course not.” She turned her shoulder to me so I

couldn't see her face, but I saw her reach up to catch the falling tear. What had I done? I tried to remember and came up blank, I didn't know how to react. She was annoyed with me, I understood that much. She turned abruptly to leave and I grabbed her arm and held her. She curled up with me and we smoked.

"I only wish we could stay like this," she whispered.

"Why can't we?"

She went to pull away but I held her anyway; she stayed. "I just don't know."

And there we stayed. I felt better with her around, I don't know why. I wouldn't call it love, but I was at ease for that moment. For that fraction of eternity, I was at peace with the world. For a moment because that's all you get. And all love is really is the loss of valuable emotions. It made some semblance of sense to me, you don't have to understand. Or maybe you do.

Some things just don't need words. I'll have to try using a picture instead.

So there we were. There we were when the world awoke and the crew came wandering out of their corners. And there we stayed until the smoke was nothing more than a false illusion. If I could hold on to one moment, freeze it, keep it, that would've been it. Everyone came out of hiding and woke up slowly. Today Dyre was on the line. Today was the day of reckoning.

By noon, the gears were turning and insanity became reality. Dyre could go in to negotiate entry. Ashe would be standing by, armed, in case they got too suspicious. Galat and Toryn would also be standing by, placed on nonchalant street corners. Hadrien and I were going to stay here, with Dev, in case of emergency. Anything goes wrong, break and run. It's never too late to run and with lives on the line, pride is not

a luxury that we could easily afford.

Dyre was going to be meeting with Lyre, Marcellus' right hand man. They'd negotiate terms and we'd have someone on the inside. I had to wait at home for the report, but I was told that everything went smoothly. We'd have little to no contact once he got inside; he'd try to get word to us when he could. He'd be under constant surveillance for the first few days/weeks. We'd deal with the hand we were dealt. Things were okay for a little while too, then the downfall began. Dyre was put to the test.

Initiation – kill someone. There was a complication in the plan; I left Dev at home to go help. Cellus' boys got a hold of Ashe. Dyre's test would be to kill his brother, he was supposed to shoot him – point blank. If he refused, they both die. The crew needed a plan, there was a time limit. Midnight – everything goes to Hell. We needed help.

This' the Endless' war, they could help us in this. But there was no way to find them; you don't find them, they find you. And they only find you when there's a job to be done. Having no other bright ideas, we went to the Dragon and beseeched the last surviving Drakes.

Payge and Set Drake were living legends. Everyone knew the story, everyone remembered the great tragedy. The streets were cold and calm out of respect to them. Those kids were raised by mean streets, they knew the value of life, the price of survival. We went in, "we" being Galat, Toryn and myself. And we began to plead our case to deaf ears and lost eyes.

"No," Payge told us resolutely. "There's been enough blood. We must remain neutral."

"But, you have to help. They'll die!"

"You did this to yourselves," Set whispered. Toryn shot him a glare while I concentrated on Payge. They truly were their

parents. In every respect.

“Just help us find the Endless and we’ll be gone,” Galat pleaded. They both folded their arms and shook their heads in silence. Their answer would stand.

“What about Klyde?” Galat whispered. That got their attention, looking up in unison, they tried to level us out.

“What do you know about Klyde?” Set demanded.

Galat staggered, “Nothing, except that he’s the killer of killers. The clans tell tales of him, none have seen him. But someone controls him because he’s just a ghost.”

Payge stepped back as Set slammed his hands on the counter-top. He was shaking. They both were. Toryn and I stepped back. There were going to be consequences for this, we knew it, Galat had to.

A note – The lonely streets hold many things, but the most prized among the elite are the stories of those to come before us. We glorified our martyrs and gave the proper respect due. Some legends were famous only for their cruelty, and those were only mentioned as a harsh whisper. Klyde was one of them. He was on the same shelf as Cicero, Vincent and of course – Draven. Nobody ever mentioned the late, great Draven. Why? Because he single-handedly destroyed the greatest legend of all. If Draven were cloned, Klyde would be born. This’ll take a while...

There is everything and nothing to say about Klyde. Everybody knew about Klyde, the silent killer that you don’t see and barely hear. And everyone knows where to find Klyde. If you keep right, turn left at the light, follow the rows, go to row six, plot 66. That’s why they say that Klyde is evil. Row 6 – Plot 66. 6 – 66. Klyde was, theoretically, dead. You could go see the headstone for yourself. Died at age 16, “will be missed.” Nobody missed Klyde because he wasn’t dead. Klyde was

roaming around killing people. Klyde and Draven have much in common, many people think that they're the same person. That's impossible – the real Draven is locked away in some state cage. I met him once – I went to see him awhile back, to be sure that the fairy tales were real. He told me to fuck off. Back to the point – the story of Klyde.

The way that the story goes is like this – see, Draven went crazy awhile back. He lost someone close to him, so he snapped. And he started killing people at random, well, it wasn't really random. He destroyed Cicero's gang, one by one, families and everything, tearing lives apart to calm his raging soul. There was a case once, just a single exception, when lives of the innocent were spared. A child, young and free, who earned the honor of watching her mother bleed to death in someone else's arms. From there, a killer was born. Klyde was that child, orphaned by Draven's self-righteous revenge. Klyde grew up through the wars, witnessed the destruction of tradition and honor. And he died, or appeared to. It just made his job that much easier.

Klyde was the sniper, the wolf hunting from the rooftops. Hence why nobody saw him, those that had didn't live long enough to tell anybody. Klyde killed without conviction, though he seemed to have a thing for power. When Vince disappeared, everybody thought that Klyde got it. No way – Klyde's style is very public, he's always sure to "sign" his victims.

Bottom line, the main idea? Klyde was the private assassin of the Endless, the silent voice of justice from afar. Or so the stories go. A death manufactured to make Klyde's job that much easier; again, nobody ever saw Klyde. He was loyal to none, only himself. People are always more likely to believe the worst-case scenario. We are more inclined to remember a particularly horrendous nightmare than a good dream.

Bottom line – looking for Klyde was asking for trouble.

Set and Galat had words passed in hushed whispers. Galat shrugged off the hostility and walked out. Toryn and I glanced around a bit, then left. Outside we stood around awkwardly, silent and confused. And with all hope gone, Death comes lurking our way. Entropy himself, moving steady, set in our general direction. He stood casually, hands in his pockets, looking at our expressions.

“Well, aren’t we the chipper bunch; tell me children, what are you conspiring?”

“We need help.”

“So I hear. Tell me, what do you expect me to do for you?”

“Help!”

He shrugged his shoulders, “How?” he asked lazily. He leaned against the shop, paying a minimal amount of attention to our drama. He didn’t care, or maybe he was just pretending to piss us off. It was impossible to be sure. Galat grabbed hold of him and dragged him into the alley, glaring contemptuously. Entropy merely smiled and rearranged himself.

And then he socked Galat right in the jaw. Galat hit the ground, blood leaking between his fingers. Toryn and I stood frozen.

“Let me explain something kids. This’ your war. We will tend to the fallen, we’ll collect the pieces in the end, but right now, this’ all yours. You fuck up, you pay the price. We are not paid mercenaries, we won’t save you. Figure it out and don’t ever come looking for us again. And, by the way, Klyde doesn’t exist.”

Toryn stepped up and squared herself out. Entropy merely smiled at her quietly. I was frozen, the scene passed me by. Galat was lurking next to me, quiet, blood still staining his hands. Whatever happened, Toryn backed away and Entropy left

us there, broken and defeated. There was no hope. Our only option was to go in and do our damndest. And so we would.

Returning home, we explained our situation. Dev and Hadrien would be coming with us for this one, we'd need everybody to pull this off. We sat to consider our options, which we lacked. Basically, we'd hide out armed and ready and take action when tensions were high.

A lot was happening quickly, I'll stop and explain later. Right now, I've got to get going. Planning to do and no time, we have to get moving. Time's running short, as per usual.

Well here goes, the crew, ready to fight, to bleed and die for each other.

Wish me well.

Here goes everything.

7. We Four Horsemen

Stop, rewind, repeat in slow motion. Let me slowly explain the dazed blur of events that we bore witness to. Piece by piece, here's the result, here is the painstaking event.

We were at the warehouse by 11, each armed, each positioned at a strategic point, ready to burst into the scene. Hadrien was ready with a rifle; he'd be our long-range cover. Everything relies on trust. Absolute loyalty and devotion to one another. This would be the proving grounds. We lurked in the darkness, listening carefully for life. By 11:30, the gang started flooding in, small groups, quietly coming out of the shadows and disappearing just as quickly. Dyre was led in near the end of the parade. All of the

gangsters had their faces covered, like a midnight masquerade. And finally, coming up in the rear, the nightmare Himself, with the faithful in tow, Lyre silently at his side. Marcellus took his time, checking over his shoulder a few times. And the ceremony began.

Chairs were set up, Marcellus' being bigger and very prominent. Dyre stood there, alone, broken away from the group. He didn't belong there. After some introductory speaking, Ashe was dragged in, fighting to the last. We all moved into place, waiting for Dyre's hand to level out. His gun was leveled...and we went in. From doors all around, we ran in and shot at everybody in sight. A single loud shot rang out and I turned to see Ashe's knees buckle as his body dropped. Dyre hadn't moved. For a split second I realized that Dyre hadn't fired. Searching the rafters, I saw the moving shadow outline. Klyde. We grouped up and ran out, bleeding, dying but still moving. We ran to the door as a group, bullets sailed everywhere. We were almost out when the shots stopped and just one rang out. One shot, then another, just solitary shots back and forth. And we were out.

We ran to the Dragon, collapsing inside – Dyre had a key to let us in. Dyre had Ashe; he'd carried him in his arms, laying him on the floor. We were all bleeding and broken from various locations. Dyre was silent, Hadrien looked at our bloody faces compared to his shining smile. Dev seemed to be okay, Galat and her were on good terms. Toryn collapsed in a chair. I went over to hold her, only to find her covered in blood. Klyde had gotten her, we were running short on time. I started to run to a phone to call someone when a hand grabbed my wrist. Payge Drake looked at me in an expression of anger and concern. Set was outside with a car running. We grouped up, leaving Dyre with Ashe, and we went to the hospital.

Galat and Dev were treated for minor injuries, nothing fatal. Hadrien went for a walk to clear his head. Toryn was slipping though, they brought her into surgery as they tried to treat

me. I shrugged them off, pacing around as I bled. Payge watched me curiously.

“You should let them help you.”

“Fuck them, I want to know about Toryn.”

“It’ll be awhile, just hope.”

“Fuck hope!”

“Then love.”

“Fuck love too! Love is the most overrated, wasted, damaging...oh.”

I didn’t realize it, but she was crying. We all knew the story. The Drakes were the most beautiful legend of all. Both of them were dead now, Payge’s parents, in the name of love. I sat down with her, repeating my apology over and over again. I held her, letting her cry into my bloody soul. Raised with and by gangs, she understood how everything goes. Set was lurking around with Galat and Dev. He happened to come back to us to find us there. He tore me out of the chair by an arm. Payge caught hold of him, whispered a few words, and the raging bull was calmed. He sat down with his sister, with me on her other side, Galat and Dev sitting across from us.

By early in the morning, it was decided that they’d all go home and I’d wait. Payge and Set would drop everyone home, then open the shop. Later on, they’d come back for me. I told them not to waste their time. I refused to leave until I knew that she’d be all right. Hours later, a young doctor came and woke me up. This unfortunate girl would have to deliver the news to me; she sat down and waited for me to wake up. I rubbed my eyes and asked her the outcome. She shuffled through papers on a clipboard, going over facts and figures.

“She’s alive, but it’ll take a few days before we’re positive. She’s bouncing from stable to not. For the most part, she’s

okay. I can't make any promises though. Along with minor injuries, she sustained a severe shot from beyond, it struck organs. It'll be awhile before she gets out of surgery. They fix one thing...well, you know. What's your relation to her?"

I don't know exactly when I got up, but I was moving. I don't know where I was headed, but I had to keep moving. The words faded away, the doctor moved along to breaking someone else. I was losing her, my stupidity did this. No, she signed up willingly. We all knew how to play the game. Everyone knows the rules. You sign up, your life is always on the line. I stood around, debating with myself, watching life pass by. I watched doctors and nurses hurry back and forth, eager to save lives.

Someone come save mine.

Please?

I promise to be good.

One of the doctors caught my attention as he passed, I fell in step behind him. Hands deep in pockets, hurried step...clothes under the lab coat were all black. This was no doctor, this was a street demon at work. I followed closely until I saw him about to go into surgery, a gun was visible. I crept up and grabbed him from behind and we struggled right there. Doctors called security to pry us apart – I couldn't stop. I kept hitting until I had nothing left. By the time security arrived, Lyre was merely a bloody heap on the ground. I got up, dusted myself off, and walked away. And now I don't know what to do. I decided to wait, so I went resolutely back to the waiting room. After awhile there, I slept. I woke up to Payge next to me.

"Good afternoon, tiger," her voice bright and cheerful.

"Um, anything new?" I heard myself mutter.

"...not yet," she whispered.

"Set?"

"Outside of the operating room...just in case."

And I got comfortable again with the intent to go back to sleep. She stayed there with me, I remember her warm embrace. She'd lost so much, she was raised to be compassionate – she knew nothing more than absolute devotion. When I woke up again, I wasn't there, I was in a room. How I got there, I don't know. Toryn was lying on the bed in front of me, sleeping peacefully. Machines beeped and blinked to announce their function. I was alone again. Walking around, I found Set outside the doorway, arms folded. He caught a hold of me as I passed.

"Hey man, sorry about before, just strung out. She's the only family I've got left."

"Only if you make it that way."

And back to sleep with Set on security. Trust is a really funny thing. I was too tired to care, I dozed off on the bed next to Toryn. Waking up, I found her peering down at me, grinning.

"Looks like you'll make it, it was pretty touch and go for awhile."

"What are you doing out of bed?" I muttered, getting up to stretch.

"How long have you been here? Or how long have I?"

I shrugged my shoulders, ushering her back to her bed. She settled back down, as comfortable as you'd expect in a hospital bed. Her eyes shone although her usual color was gone; there was a break in her spirit.

"This wasn't wise Dean, who'll foot the bills?"

"I will," a voice answered. I turned on a heel, finding Entropy there.

"Fuck you, get out," I hissed under my breath.

"Now, now, dear Havok, you always knew that the Endless don't get involved. This is your war, we merely set the scene."

"You bastard, I'll tear you apart," I went to lunge at him but Toryn held me back. The piercing look in her eyes, I stayed and glared at him past her.

"What do you really want?" Toryn asked him quietly. Entropy sat and got comfortable. He smiled nonchalantly. My muscles ached from the sudden arrest of movement.

"What do I want? I want it to end. The end is required. This madness has been going on for generations, everything has to end somewhere. This' a mortal war, but the Endless clean up your petty wars. This will all come to a head in due course, but for right now, we need our key players intact. The truth is yet to be revealed."

Toryn locked up, I could feel her shaking. Entropy bid us farewell and left as quickly as he'd come. I looked around the room, Toryn's wide-eyed expression. This is insane. I picked up Toryn and held her in my arms for a moment. With her consent, I disconnected her from the hospital. Wrapping her up in my coat, I carried her out; the protests a mere blur of sound behind me. Set got up and walked with me, Payge appeared out of nowhere.

"Took you long enough," Set smirked. We got past a certain distance and they stopped trying to stop us. Set got into the driver's seat of the car as Toryn and I crept into the back. Payge sat silently in the front passenger. They dropped us at the building and were quick to leave. I began to climb the

stairs, Toryn still tightly kept in my arms. I kicked at the door until Galat let us in, communication being completely unnecessary. I carefully laid Toryn out on the couch, finding myself collapsed on the floor. My mind was blank. I looked around to determine everyone's location.

Galat was lurking around making coffee, Dev was wandering around like a lost child. Dyre was missing. I began to question his location when he came through the door, tired, dirty, a large shovel in hand. He left the shovel at the door and collapsed into a chair. Whether he noticed our return, I'm not sure. Galat handed him a cup and moved away. Dyre sat there, lost, alone. Hadrien was out in the waking world. I was afraid to question him, so I sat across from him quietly. He merely looked past me. Dev, Galat, the rest of the room fades out. I tried to calm myself.

"I'm sorry," I heard myself whisper. Dyre halfway nodded.

"Why?"

"We tried to save him."

"I know. I quit," he murmured. I started to protest, finding my voice grow smaller with each attempt. He paid minimal attention to my protests, he merely got out of the chair, moving to stand. I moved to keep level with him. My ranting stopped abruptly.

"You're in over your head, kid. Remember what happened last time? Don't you?" His tone got weaker. I didn't know what to say, how to respond. He shook his head, Hadrien crept in as Dyre moved to leave.

"Where is he going?" Hadrien demanded.

"He quit."

"Quit? He can't quit!" Hadrien went out the door and returned with Dyre before him. The two started screaming back and forth

hurriedly, pointing and gesturing rapidly. Dev and Galat stood on the sidelines, watching remarks streak back and forth. They started swinging punches as we watched in silence. What showed me how distant I was...was how they stopped. Toryn got up and pulled them apart, breathing heavily.

"Grow up!" she hissed as the two stood apart, rosy-cheeked and embarrassed. They didn't dare mutter anything to disrespect her. Dyre waited until she found a chair before replying.

"I've made my decision, I'm not living this lie anymore," he pointed at me. "Tell him the truth."

I looked around at flushed faces, shocked expressions. Hadrien swung another punch and the screaming continued. I sat and held the crying Toryn, still unable to understand the truth. Dyre broke away and moved toward the door.

"You might be able to live with your sins, but I've made amends, and I'll always pay for my crime. You might be able to pretend Vince's death didn't happen, but he was there. You all know the truth. I refuse to be just another pawn for the Endless' personal entertainment. You have the proof right in front of you and you're running scared. I won't be caged, hell no," Dyre paused halfway out the door. "Remember Lyric and Harvey. Remember the Martyrs. Once upon a time..."

"And happily never after," I remember saying.

"Always," Dyre whispered, shutting the door behind him.

"And forever," I concluded.

Toryn was shaking in my arms, Galat and Dev collapsed somewhere. Hadrien waited a bit, then went out for a drink, Galat close behind. Dev crept out of the room quietly, locking herself away in my room.

"Toryn, the truth. What happened to me?"

She was still crying, her words shakey, "It was for your own good, it wasn't my idea. Please Dean, please forgive us."

"Why can't I remember? What do the Endless have to do with this?"

"You chose not to remember."

"Why?"

"Because we made you not want to."

I held on to her tighter, realizing that I was shaking more than she was. Whatever Dyre did, I found memories unlocked in my mind from ages ago. I clung to her for dear life.

"Please Toryn, tell me the truth."

"If love proves real."

8. Disturbing Recollection

Once upon a time, there were legends, no – they were gods.

Help!

I'm a casualty of society; I'm a victim of modern tyrants overthrowing humanism.

Save me!

I'm lost in the masses, nothing more than fiction; a figment in a mile-a-minute world.

Spare me a moment?

Hear my screams, bear my pain, pay for my madness. Listen to my story. Please?

I'm asking nicely, pleading softly, begging desperately.

Come find the abyss, take hold of my outstretched arm, save me from my own insanity.

Maybe I'm mad, but take heed of my warning.

This artful little rant I'll not remember by morning.

Sunlight hurts. Rolling out of bed, finding the world still spinning – gentle disappointment settles in. Get up, change, start moving. Sit, look around, try to figure out how much of this was here yesterday. I remember the general surroundings, the furniture arrangements, the light from the window...blink a few dozen times...everything's still real. You're awake, this isn't a dream. This isn't a nightmare either. It's just reality, basic, boring...realism. This is why we have imagination...our sole salvation to keep us from dying of routine. I do firmly believe that a life without change can kill; I can feel it eating away at my soul as it is. Day by day, everything the same, I felt my motivation slip away. My inspiration crept out the back door. It went that way, officer.

Curl up in a corner, hide away from the garish light that stings your eyes. I sit with coffee, blinking unconsciously, breathing involuntarily, drinking silently. A few moments before the day starts, before Hell comes knocking on your door, pounding like an upset child. There's no way to lock the world away, but it's worth a shot. It's early...too early to function properly. Or maybe it's just me. I might be slightly insane, just a tad unhinged. Then again, who isn't nowadays?

For a moment, the world is at peace with itself. Soft footsteps move around as part of the background. Stay curled up in the dark, my eyes became comfortable over time. The

steps creep by, a kiss on the cheek, the usual greetings.

Good morning, Vince.

My mind can't process much, like I said, too early. Vince refilled my coffee without question, he crept around almost silently. He had years of practice being nonchalant and quiet. It was somewhat comforting I guess, but it was unsettling at the same time. He was just that good and he took immense pride in his gifts.

Story time kids. Try to keep up.

Here is the case history, how we ended up where and how we did. Here's to a trip down memory lane. You might want to take notes for this.

To explain and possibly understand the present, we must meticulously explore the past. To go back, let's start with Cicero. He was the first in a steady line of lunatics. When he fell, crime reigned free...and then Vincent stood up. Cicero's death was sudden, but he'd given up control of his gang when the war started. There comes a point where it's just enough and you're old enough to "retire," if the business doesn't kill you first. Somewhere along the way, Vincent took over. And Vincent's methods might have been worse than Cicero ever was. The topic is highly debatable.

How and when I got involved with the gangs isn't important. Something about Vince struck me and I got sucked in. Clawing my way through his ranks, I made it to my dignified location on God's right hand. From the gang, I met Galat, Hadrien...and Havok. Dean was all kinds of reckless when he was younger; reckless is just another word for stupid. But he had something going for him – he had heart. Real, true, honest...devotion. He genuinely cared, which set him apart from most of the gang. I spent a lot of time with him to learn more about myself. It's a gang, a family, a permanent marriage. Then we reached divorce...

Vincent got involved with his girl...involved in a bad way. Her name was Lyric. Once upon a time, we killed a cop as part of a personal vendetta. Lyric just so happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time...we had a witness. Standard procedure would be a single bullet to the back of the head, down where your spine and neck connect. Vincent decided to violate the family code for a bit of personal pleasure. The ranks knew better than to question the leader's decision. We followed blindly...but the Lyric situation made most of us question our morality, our loyalty. If we hadn't questioned our loyalty previously...

Lyric was doomed to die – we all knew that in advance. Even she knew it. But nobody knew when. By the time Vince set a deadline, we were all tense and most of the crew wanted out. Dean was loyal as loyal comes, he volunteered to be there when Vince finished her. Him and Deklyn went with Vince to the meeting with Lyric. Out of the four of them...only Dean walked out standing. And the way he walked out...I don't think that classifies as standing. Havok bore witness to the truth. No, Dean. Dean bore witness to Deklyn's murder by Vince's hand. He stood and watched in silent horror as the Endless came to claim the lost. He watched as Elysium killed Vince and Harvey, ending the madness. Or so they thought.

They had to have known that he was there, but they let him go. Maybe they wanted the truth to get out. Maybe they planned on it. Maybe they were secretly hoping for it. But then the war would never end; it didn't add up...there were factors missing. Dean came back to us like a madman, his voice racing as he explained to myself, Galat and Hadrien, what had happened. If the truth got out, the war would never end. Vincent's death would make things bad enough, but at the hand of the Endless? There would be no loyalty; the gangs would tear themselves apart from the inside out...no trust. The streets would howl for the Endless' blood...the Endless who bootlegged a unity amongst groups. It just didn't add up...we couldn't let the truth get

out. Lives were at stake; many thousands of lives...we didn't just do it for us. We did it for all the innocents that would suffer for this. Making Dean believe that truth wouldn't set him free was the challenge.

I'll admit it...I loved him then. Before the madness, before the war, I truly did. Like I said, he had heart. He wasn't consumed by the hatred that had destroyed Vince. Everyone thought of me as Vince's girl; I was merely the only one that he couldn't have. I let Vince think that he held my leash, but he knew better. He knew that unattended, I'd bite him just as easily as he could bite me. That's how it works with stubborn people. So I let Vince think what he wanted, and I let myself go the way I wished. Dean had something. Vince didn't approve, naturally, so I didn't make such a big deal of it. I didn't want to create waves. With Vince out of the way, not only did I have freedom...I had the opportunity for power. Dean and I could rule the whole thing side by side, but he had to understand first that some things are better left unsaid.

We tried to talk to him, rationally, logically, patiently proving our point. He wouldn't have it. He was determined to do the "right thing," and the cost would be worth it. Galat and Hadrien were running out of options, we couldn't keep him locked away from the world forever. I was supposed to distract his mind. And then we'd start to screw with him. Make him think he's seeing or hearing things that aren't there. The process would take awhile, but the end result...was...Dean. Havok was dead. Havok, the gangster with a heart who would take on the world for honor and cared about few and was warm to touch at all times...he was gone. We'd killed him with our desperation. With our lies, we killed the only person I could honestly say I ever truly loved. I killed him...not we. I. There's no bending the truth now.

It took weeks to get him to believe he was insane. He blocked out everything. And I mean *everything*. His memory and attention skills went right out the window...he wasn't focused

anymore. Nothing seemed to matter. What we had was merely a shadow of a fiction. And what makes it worse? The absolute worst part of the entire fiasco – he blames himself. We made him believe that he did something wrong to hurt us, to hurt me. And he blames himself wholeheartedly for it. It's not fair. It's not right. But I did this, and now I pay the price for my treachery.

After Vince's fall, the gang was in shambles, I tried to regain power, but there was an eager fellow ready to overthrow me. His name was Marcellus. Well, that's not entirely accurate, there was a branch of time in between. When Vince fell, the gang lost its' heart, its' spirit. A lot of the old members quit and let go. A few stranglers tried to hold it together. It wouldn't stay. Marcellus was close with Vince, but there was an underlying tension that everyone felt. Marcellus was young for the role. And not only was there Marcellus, but his dear darling baby sister, Dev.

How it happened, I don't know. There was a situation and I had to leave my home territory and go on a bit of a business trip. The information was relayed improperly, purposely so I came to learn too late, and in my wake, the gang was rebuilt. Galat, Hadrien and Dean dropped out as Marcellus took the group by force. I came back to find my loyalties scattered, everything I'd thought I'd known...fragmented. Instead of fighting for the pieces, trying to wretch my life back from the children, I let it go and moved on. Dean was Dean; Havok was long gone...so we started over. We found new professions, most of which were not far from the old haunts. And over the course of five years, we fought and bled and tried and cried...and in the end we were just too old to play the game. So the big dogs were fenced and became typical upstanding citizens.

Yeah, sure, in what parallel little fucked up universe are you coming from? We did what we could to get by, legal or not, wherever the business carried you. We took the apartments close together to keep contact. The more time passed, the less

Dean remembered. I think Hadrien physically beat a lot of it out of him. I don't know. We did so much to hurt him; we all screwed him over terribly. But it was for the greater good, or so we thought. It's always the self righteous that suffer the most. Always.

Dyre knew about Dean knowing the truth...well, I'm not quite sure how Dyre knew. Dyre was a sneaky character, he knew a little of everything that he wasn't supposed to. He had his own tragedy once upon a time; he was done with it all now. He was never really part of the gangs, maybe, a long time ago, but that's another story. There's always a reason to quit. Pain is on the top of the list right under "sudden cardiac arrest".

Hmm, seems I got a little sidetracked and lost. I forget where I was...if I was anywhere at all. This I explained to Havok...to Dean, in the most comforting words I could find. And even those words weren't soft enough. I knew he'd hate us but he needed to know the truth, so I gave it to him, in all the pieces and shattered parts. We lied to him, we made him blame himself...there's no two ways about it. There are no words to forgive what we've done; I think I cracked him a bit though. Or at least...well...dented a few bits of him. I'm not too sure anymore. I told him all this as carefully as I could manage and his whole body locked up. He wouldn't speak; he just sat down and wrote. He wrote the things that he did know, the stories he was sure of. He lost himself in fiction because it was less painful than truth.

Can you really blame him? You can try, doesn't guarantee results...

God help me...no one else will. I pray he understands...please.

Damnation is at hand. This' the price...I earned my keep. And then some...

9. Forsaken

The stories are the only things that seem to remain constant anymore. They're honest; pure...they are the only things that I can truly trust. I have the pieces, pictures and obituaries...I am the keeper of tales new and old. When all else fails, become what you truly are. I'm the timekeeper.

The prologue to all this, the very first generation in a steady chain of madness goes back years. The **Nolan** family, which collapsed upon itself. After the generations of blood destroyed by the adults' insanity, two survived the Nolan family's massacre of each other. **Faith** and **Declan**, devoted siblings – they survived the madness. And they were better for it.

The Nolan family – parents, grandparents, and an uncle, all died at each other's hand. Whether by stress, murder or suicide, the clan continued only through the two young children that persevered. Declan, the older, protective brother. Upstanding, righteous, but still pliable. He was considerate and just as well. Faith, his baby sister, writes down our first chapter of history. Her record sets the stage for later dysfunction. Faith is the first in a series of tragic heroes to overcome adversity and even out the odds. Through pain and loss, good fortune comes personified.

The **James** family. The picture of perfection, two ideal parents and three perfect children. Or almost perfect...there's always an exception. Hope, Mike and Catherine James, children cut almost directly from God's grace...until one of them fell. **Hope** – the convict. The innocent child hardens into the strong adult, rebellion burned deep into the surface. Hope James is the original bad ass, the trademarked Rebel; worn around the

edges just enough to be considered less than orthodox. She was the oldest, followed by her all-American brother, Mike, and the smallest angel, Catherine. **Mike James** – star athlete, popular, all around great guy. High school God at the time of the tragedy. **Catherine**, the child Saint, kept sheltered from most of the madness. **Mr. James** – the doctor; successful, busy, humanist. **Mrs. James** – kind, slightly deranged, in the long run...unstable. She got away with appearing “normal” for awhile, but her true madness shines through at the end. Bottom line? They were everything that the Nolan family lacked. They were their saviors from abandonment. The James family took in the Nolan siblings, when their lives were mere shadows of dust.

The two families got along as best as tensions would allow. Sure, there were issues, mostly of pride. Two groups of highly stubborn, pride-oriented kids pitted against one another. There were issues, but ultimately they were resolved and their relationships strengthened. Declan and Hope would get married in later years...long after the fiasco. There's still more to the drama, as always. Nothing is as simple as it appears to be. There was a slight hitch in how things operated.

His name was Gavin Riley.

Gavin was our earliest connection to the gangs, the first in a long line of leaders and cruelty. Gavin was probably the last good leader that they'd ever seen. He was young and proud, true, but he was fair. He had morals and heart. He was the last of the extinct breed. Gavin Riley got involved with the Nolan kids by pure chance. They were passing through his territory one night and he happened upon them. Gauntlets were thrown, challenges made...and in the end, respect was earned on all sides. Gavin's motives are questionable, not as much is known about him as we'd like to think, but he was a good guy all around. He married Faith later on. Gavin was highly mysterious, nobody's determined for certain why he stuck around as long as he did and tolerated all that he did. Maybe he was just a good guy. Like I said, last of a dying breed...but

Christ, he put up with a lot. A hell of a lot...

So there are the key players in the legend. Faith, Declan, Hope and Gavin held the most cards. Then there was **Rob** and **Julie**, who play a more important part later on in the story. They were the top dogs in Gavin's gang, under himself, naturally. They were tough as nails, siblings, they might have been twins, I don't think anybody ever clarified whether they were or weren't. It's not all that important, but it's interesting to know, you know? It's like useless information...it won't get you anywhere, but it's nice to have.

Mrs. James got committed in the end, Gavin and Faith ended up together. Gavin quit the gang and became a cop, though he checked in on his boys from time to time. Rob and Julie were military kids; they worked hard, tried hard, and did well if you think about it. Declan and Hope quit trying to kill one another long enough to wed and breed. Isn't it sweet? The pretty little fairy tale that life is? I'm sure that there were other factors along the way, but I don't think they're half as significant as we care to mention. In Gavin's absence, Cicero took over, which should be dully noted. As a bit of "useless" information for later reference –

Happily Ever After.