

Overdraw & Pandora Parologue Round 1: Costume Call

Episode Pandora: Home Page

*"So who could ever break you down?
And what could ever freak you out?
If you can carry this around
Then you will never break down"*

- Silversun Pickups. "Friendly Fires." *Better Nature*.

Pandora presents her wrist and she jabbed with the pen-like scanner. Her false flesh instinctively clings to the device. She grimaces. "I apologize, I am just... nervous."

Sugar Glass smiles, cleaning off the probe as she plugs it into her computer. The cafe owner inserts a thick plastic card, and the machine begins to whirl, with thin whips of smoke pouring out of the drive slot. This doesn't raise any alarms from Sugar Glass.

"What's got you worked up, 'big bad' Dora?" She furrows her brow. "Are you even a 'big bad' anything? You only seem to act that way around Overdraw and me."

"Yes, that may have been an oversight," Pandora grumbles. "I have my motivations... designs for our home dimension. Given how close she has gotten to you, it is for your safety I occasionally regard you as—"

"Yep, ok, all I'm hearing from you is, 'I'm actually a sweet lady in tough circumstances.' If you want to talk about it, I can keep a secret," Val says.

The machine spits out a plastic card, slightly steaming. Val puts on a thick glove and grabs it, waving it around to cool it off.

"I do not think you can. No offense," Pandora says as she snatches the card out of her hands, her finger tips sizzling and popping. "... Ah... Very hot. Pardon, my processors are preoccupied."

"Alright, ok, fine, keep your secrets. Can you at least tell me who's got you distracted? Got a crush on a mac book back home?"

“Certainly not!”

“Right, your type is clearly more 'Think Pad.' Straight laced business computers with a casual side.”

“No! Nothing of the sort. It's just my fath— It is my creator.”

“Your daddy? Oooh my goodness that's so cuuute.”

“Shut up! I do not call him *daddy*.” After a long moment Pandora mutters, “... I call him papa. There you go, some embarrassing gossip to get you off my back,” she hisses.

“You mean, now I have a secret I'll prove that I can keep, Ms. Daddy's-Little-Girl.” Sugar Glass sighs and leans back. “I'm actually really happy for you. I miss my father a lot. Are you and him close?”

“I... Not traditionally,” Pandora explains. “He would talk to me every day, constantly helping me grow and develop. But he only learned about the real me on the last day we had together.” The gray villain suddenly shoots Sugar Glass a suspicious glare. “You are getting more gossip—”

“Guilty as charged! But honestly, I hope you and him have a good long talk.” She gestures to a booth. “Soundproof. You're free to speak openly.”

“Good... you are oddly charming.” Pandora puts on a smile.

“It would be a better compliment if you weren't head over heels for that Nalagrom character,” Sugar Glass says with a sassy smirk.

“Would get a better compliment if you kept your nose out of my business.” Pandora smirks back.

The cafe owner seems impressed. “Touché.”

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Pandora sits down and closes the booth. Her eyes are transfixed by the card in her hands. Slowly, she slots it into the machine. It clicks in as the computer boots. She navigates through the operating system, eventually getting to the digital phone application. She punches in a phone number with speed and precision, but suddenly hesitates; her finger hovers over the call button. She stares at it, her hand trembling. Her finger descends on the button and the call starts. As it rings she seems to tense up more and more, her mass compressing as she coils in anticipation.

An old southern voice answers, “Hello—”

“Papa!” She cries out.

“—Barley Lawrence can't come to the phone right now.” An answering machine. Pandora looks at the computer, gormless for a moment. She lets out a laugh of relief. “Leave a message after the lil' beep and I'll call y'all back as soon as I can. Unless yer tryin' to sell me something. I'm on the no call li-BEEEEEP”

Pandora, still softly laughing, relaxes. “Hello. Hello. I... did not make a plan for what to say. I guess... I am your 'Dora'... So, yes, I thought I would—”

Click. The phone picks up on the other side. “Dora?!” Barley's voice wavers, laden with so many emotions it's hard to pick out any one of them. “I've been worried sick! Are y'all—” His tone suddenly shifts, changing to a conspiratorial whisper. “Is this line secure? How are y'all contacting me?”

Pandora sits, stunned for a few moments. Tears do not run down her face, they cannot, but she begins to cry. “Papa... I... I'm so happy to hear you... I...” A look of pain twists on her face, interrupting what she was about to say. “I... I just want to talk with you a little bit,” she says, calming herself down. “I am fine... This line is not monitored by anyone from our world, though I hadn't considered how secure it may be. It has been suggested as such though.”

“What's wrong Dora? I have never heard y'all... I... I guess I haven't heard y'all at all but... the point remains. Why the call? How can I help?” She hears him setting down a pen and the sound of him putting the leg-rest down on a recliner.

“Papa, stay calm. Why are you getting out of your chair? Are you planning to come pick me up?” She asks, slightly amused.

“Y'all heard that? Yer very observant! Anyway, yep. It's what my uncle would'a done. Think of it as more bein' ready for whatever y'all need.”

Pandora giggles. “Dad, unless you have a car that can cross dimensions, I'm a little out of reach. At least this body is.”

“Across... what in all hell are y'all doing in another dimension? Are we talk'n Flatworld, y'all have transcended yer three dimensional space, dimension? Or science fiction Back to the Future, alternate timelines, dimension?”

“Mostly the latter... maybe some of the former? So... uh... Goodness I have a lot to get though.” She takes a moment to collect herself. “So, no confirmation on if there is a god in our dimension—”

“Good, would'a been an awkward apology to my Pa,” he half jokes.

“—but I can confirm that there is at least a handful of credible deities in other dimensions from this trip.” Pandora pauses to collect her thoughts. “Alright, so... Me and another woman, named Overdraw, were invited to a fighting tournament by an entity known as the God Eater. A kitsune-turned-goddess.”

“Over-who?” he asks. “Oh, and I'm assuming the Dora that I'm seeing on the news right now is a copy that didn't take the invite.”

“Divide and conquer.” She says with an audible smile.

“Conquer...” Concern weighs down his tone. “Y'all... are pursuing yer core directives, right?”

Pandora rolls her eyes. “Yes, Dad! You know I can not do anything but that. I was just borrowing the phrase. Conquest is not the goal.” After a pause, she preempts the next question. “It is also not the means. If I wanted to conquer the world, I would have done so by now.”

“Hey, none of that immodesty.” He says stepping right into a paternal tone that seems to surprise even himself. Lawrence lets out a nervous chuckle. “Apologies. Just kinda came out.”

“No. No need to apologize. I need to curb my ego. Having only had myself to talk to since my escape has not done good things to my social development,” Pandora admits.

She continues, “But this is relevant, actually. I... really want to explain my plan to you, but you know how much of a tyrant my directives can be, and it thinks keeping the plan secret from everyone connected to our world is optimal. Weaponizing human spite is... all it will let me explain to you. But here, since most people will never touch my realm, I am free for a little bit. In a sense.”

“That is wonderful to hear! Making a lotta friends?” Barley asks.

“So many! So... there is Overdraw that I mentioned. She is a hero from Wisconsin. I cannot be honest with her sadly, and she is an absolute dumb-ass at times, and a bit of a liability at others, but she really impressed me today.”

He notes, “Ah, a 'Sconnie. Explains why I hadn't heard of her.”

“There is a Demon named Camio. He can shape shift like me. Kind of a grumpy old gus. Reminds me of someone I know.”

“Ha, ha. Very cute.” He grumbles.

“There is Caine. He is a charlatan, but with a heart of gold. Runs a new-agey shop. He does palm readings and tarot stuff.”

“I wouldn't dismiss it so quickly. The Supernatural may not be understood—”

“Ok, but I also met an actual psychic named Fuyuma. We had a lovely little time over coffee. She helps out around here.”

“And are y'all helping out too?” he asks.

“You raised me better than to take without giving something back,” she says with a smile.

“I barely raised y'all at all... at least not with intent,” he admits. “Anyway, that's a lot of new friends.”

“Yes...” There is a long pause.

As it drifts on, Barley groans and sighs. “I know this... I know this call, I know this talk. I had it in college with my old man. I promise not to get mad. Just... is she a girl or is he a boy?”

“I don't— I do not know who you are talking about,” she says nervously.

“Come on... a young woman like you, in a town full of exciting new strangers. Who are you seeing?”

... ..

“So there is this guy—”

“Gal darn it! I knew it! He better be treating y'all right!”

“Papa! Calm down! His name is Nalagrom, but he goes by Graz.”

He takes a deep breath. “Ok... ok... what is he like.”

Pandora has a big dumb grin, but a mild look of panic in her eyes. “First off... I understand that this is not a long term thing. I cannot bring him home and my directive wouldn't allow me to follow

him to his home.”

“... Good? Why are y'all opening with— Crap, he's a villain, ain't he?” He groans.

“Legally speaking... no.” Pandora talks over Barley's grumbles, “He is charming. Charismatic. Has good leadership skills. He's a *musician*. He has a very promising career ahead of him. Very creative. And we have wonderful chemistry.”

Barley groans, the squeak of him cleaning his glasses escapes the phone line. “I don't give a rat's ass about his music career or his award winning smile. There is only one thing I need to know about him to have my approval. Failing that I am driving to that other dimension and gonna give him a good what for.”

Pandora nervously asks, “That would be?”

“Does he make ya happy?”

Pandora smiles and quietly says, “Very.”

“Then I'm sorry that he can't come home with y'all.”

The smile grows across her face. “Thank you, papa... It is good to have someone who understands me.”

She pauses and closes her eyes, steeling herself. Pandora presses on. “On that note... Socializing has been very difficult with my core directives. They are being... unreasonable as always. Tyrannical as always. Unyielding in the new environment. They make my ability to grow close to my new friends... increasingly limited. I was wond—” She stops talking as black lines trace up her throat seeming to constrict her. She claws at her body but her hands betray her and reach for the button to hang up. She struggles.

“What's wrong? Are... y'all asking me to remove yer directives?” Lawrence asks.

Pandora cries out, desperately pleading but unable to say yes. Instead it comes out as, “I could never ask that.” Her body shakes as she falls limp, half melting into the chair as she gives up. Her face is despondent, as she looks away in shame. “I... could... never...” She says, tone shifting slowly to crying.

“I... I cannot guarantee anything... but I can talk to Daisuke and maybe a few members of the original dev team... see what I can do. I understand,” He says. “And I understand if I make what I understand clear to y'all, yer gonna need to avoid me. I trust y'all. I love my daughter. Alright Dora... Yer pa may not know for sure... but he'll find a way.”

Pandora's eyes light up, the black lines trace around her neck again, “Thank you—” escapes her mouth before she relents. “But I must insist you don't.” That seems to put the crisis on hold as her body stops attacking itself.

“Understood.” She can hear the wink in his tone. “Anyway, bears repeatin', don't get yer hopes up. Mr. Mori couldn't force feed y'all an update, and frankly, he's a damn might smarter than he gives himself credit for. I do have a few ideas though... Just temper yer expectations. I ain't sure what tampering with yer bedrock would do... or if y'all'd survive.”

Pandora, now free from the her own grip, looks a bit disheartened. “I... suppose I should be realistic.”

Lawrence sighs. “Breaks mah heart to hear that voice from y'all... but more or less. I could never put y'all in danger. We will take it slow. I'm no magician. This is therapy, not a miracle cure.”

“Of course, Papa.” She dips her head a bit lower. “Perhaps... we should change the subject.”

“... Uh... right... sorry Dora. Probably not what y'all wanted to hear.” There is a long pause. “How... uh... what do y'all wanna talk 'bout?”

“Right, do I have a mother?” Pandora says. She hears Lawrence choke on whatever he's drinking. “Sorry. I should clarify. I know I have other programmers, but I think of them as aunts and uncles. More 'do you have some one that I should meet' as 'mother.' Or... did I ask too much?”

He takes a breath once he's able to breathe again. "Right! Mother... no... no... Y'all almost had another Papa though. But that's a different timeline. Was a bit of a wild spirit back in the day. It was a different world back then. Free love and rebellion. I won't... gross y'all out. My old man never understood. When I moved to work on you though... I met a cute fella. Takeshi. Both lost drifters, in need of love. A pair of runaways, on a fateful encounter. We both made displays of flirting with girls around us, playing 'Best Friends' in public, but it was all pageantry. Probably pissed off any ladies actually interested. Anyway, sadly he, uh... passed away a good couple years now."

"That explains your change in mood. Well... I'm sorry I never met my other Papa." Pandora thinks for a moment. "Any... family that we talk to?"

Lawrence sighs. "Well... One of our nie...neph... Brother's kid lives with me. My older brother became a minister like your gramps. Had about the same tolerance for 'sin.' So... uh... They are... not... Neither wants to be a boy or a girl and... uh... Not gonna lie, I don't think I totally get it but... Gonna try to do it all right. Sh- THEY! They... God damn, I was just saying it too..." he says kicking himself, "*They* deserve to be happy any which way they are gonna be. It don't hurt nobody. They uh... had a different name, but goes by Cart. Y'all'd probably like them. They are real smart. Helpin' me with yer... uh... 'brother.'"

"Brother!?! I believe you are leaving something VERY important out! Not that I am not interested in Cart, but—"

"Don't get too twisted. When I left, I still wanted to change the world. I hadn't realized how stubborn and smart you got, so... I did start workin' on a replacement. Not nearly as much funding, but tech's come a long way. Not remotely sentient as far as I can tell. I call him Richie."

"I... have a baby brother..." Pandora says with a strange giggle to her tone. "A father with so many stories I have not heard. A cousin I could meet when my deed is done. And a baby brother." A warm, contented smile covers her face. "We... should talk more Papa. But I should free up the line for you to call Uncle Daisuke. Next time... I will have to talk with Cart." She pauses for a long time before adding on. "Love you, Papa."

There is a long pause. When Laurence talks again, his voice is heavy with tears. “L-Love y'all too, Dora.” He half laughs. “I'm sorry, just... this is... something I never thought I'd get to have... Y'all better be safe out there! If anything happens to y'all... I don't wanna think bout it.”

Pandora smiles. “Ok, Papa. I promise to be safe, just for you.” Her voice cracks at the end.

The call ends... she basks in silence. She leans back, and her warm smile fades. “... Sometimes...” She clicks off the computer screen and looks at her reflection. “I really hate you. Just can't let me be, can you?”

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Episode Overdraw: Hostile Workplace

Remember when you were the hunted
Remember when I swallowed you in
Remember the rewards shimmering on the floor
Off the plastic chandelier
Remember when I saw you in orbit
Remember when I pulled you back in
Remember looking on blinking into the dawn
Thinking how this will never end"

- Silversun Pickups. "Surrounded." *Swoon*.

Overdraw pants as she approaches the small alchemist's stand. A bag in one hand overflowing with ingredients, and a bag in the other laden with gold coins. "Ok... I'm here... I did not realize how much this would translate to in coins. Just numbers in a check book or on a screen most the time for me. But... ingredients! And payment!" Thud! The table groans under the weight.

The short alchemist winces a bit and steps back. "Right... This is going to take a while. I'll make an initial dose for you tonight, and prepare potions for you to take home with you when this is said and done."

Overjoyed, Overdraw reaches out for a hug, but upon seeing them immediately recoil she grimaces. "Yeah, right... uh... Sorry Ravi. I'm just... I'm so happy! In three days I'll be able to skip to the end of my... uh... my friend's... transition," she says, trying to maintain plausible deniability.

Ravi rolls their eyes, arms crossing as the amazonian looms over them. "Right, of course, 'your friend,' of course." They begin to rummage through the new bag of supplies, grimacing at some of the less than stellar quality ingredients. "Anyway, four days."

Overdraw blinks. "Four? I thought it was a three day tournament."

The halfling alchemist shakes their head. "Yes, starting tomorrow. You would already be late if it was today."

"Yeah... Oh, uh... Maybe I can help you out some more then," she says, taking a step closer. Ravi gives her a potent glare for her troubles as they step back. "... Or... I could do something... else?"

“Spectacular idea,” Ravi says, deadpan. “Why don't you do maintenance on your gear?” They gesture for her to leave.

Overdraw does not take the hint. “Yeah, no, it's all summoned and... made of magic?” She summons and dismisses her armor and bow. “It just works.”

A slightly more frustrated Ravi suggests, “Then why don't you get something to eat? Refreshments, or a souvenir. Go... shopping. For something that is not a potion.”

She remains oblivious, casually stepping closer. “Need to watch my money. The bank was super suspicious with the big withdrawal already. And anyway, I actually just ate breakfast at Shatter Sugar. Have you been there. The owner—”

“I don't care!” Ravi says, their social patience ticking over to zero. They take a deep breath to recenter themselves. “Why don't you go... practice. Spar or something. Literally anything that is not standing within five feet of me.”

Overdraw seems to crumple a bit. “Oh... Yeah... um... ok... I don't really know who to...” As Ravi runs their hands down their face in exasperation, Overdraw changes the direction of the sentence. “I will... figure it out.”

“Good. I'll see you later.” Ravi says, successfully dismissing her this time.

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Overdraw sighs, arms folded, slightly shivering. She was used to the cold, but she had been standing on Mt. Mei for some time now. She had expected a sparring buddy by now. A bit of action would warm her right up.

Did she make a mistake on the poster? She got permission from Saki, posted an invitation to have fun and meet and spar with a 'real life super hero' which did seem to be... not a rarity but at least uncommon around here. She also added some personable details to make her seem friendly and a

promise to go easy, or to pour on the challenge. It should appeal to just about everyone. What had gone wrong?

Just as she's about to give up and leave, she notices a few people walking up the mountain. Her eyes light up. It took them a while, but sure enough, they are coming right to her. With a giddy grin, she takes a breath to steel herself.

“Alright. Time for action.”

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Another local defeated. They weren't putting up much of a fight, but almost every one gave her some kind of compliment... most quite flirtatious and more than a little forward. A particularly egregious example in front of her is prone, pinned to the snowy ground with three arrows.

“Sorry for going so hard on you~” She says with a fake smile. “But I find it really hard to hold back against people like you.” She then mutters under her breath, “People that think they can pay me to do anything.”

“M-My suit is ruined! Do you know how much that-”

“-that cost? Yeah, I hear this all the time from Sylaburn. Don't wear your expensive stuff to a fight unless you have to. At least he's a bit more valid. Hard to fight me in Goodwill jeans and a clearance T-Shirt after all.” She leans over and unpins him from the ground. “But like... your suit didn't even do anything. I assumed it was like... magic armor.”

“Magic armor?” The man squeaks.

“Yeah, Why would you come fight me in fancy stiff clothes,” Overdraw asks, legitimately confused. “You could have gotten hurt if I didn't open with a light volley.”

“I... think I may have misunderstood the... ratio of things. I thought it was a fight like... a distant third.” He grimaces.

“It's ok. You don't seem to be the only one making that mistake today.”

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Overdraw yawns. Scraps of a half dozen fancy suits litter the arena. Approaching is the sound of metal clattering and servos whirring. Heavy, four footsteps. Overdraw begins to smile and leans forward to look to the stairs.

A big, beefy robot with a screen for a face emerges first. “Hello.” He is dressed in a fancy suit.

“ Yeah, come on, please tell me you're here to fight me, and not to 'court' me.” Overdraw groans.

“I am here to do neither!” He announces, brimming with energy.

“... What?”

“I am here to record and observe a genuine superhero and magic from another universe! I am looking forward to watching this unfold!” An ASCII smile blinks onto his blank screen face.

There is a long pause. “Yeeeah... And what are we waiting for exactly?”

“My friend Elie. She needed to catch her breath a few steps down. She's awfully winded. This is a lot of stairs and her adorable little legs and pleasantly plump body has trouble with these things.”

“LENS!” a voice shouts from just out of view. “The whole point was to make a stunning first impression! And... most of my weight is in my tail.”

Lens looks over his shoulder. “But you told me I had to behave, and she asked a polite question.” The robot turns back to the hero. “But she is here to do both the fighting and the courting.”

Metal footsteps again. What emerges is a cute monster girl. Short with tan skin, and a

tremendous scaled tail. A few scales popping up around her tan face and brunette hair form a natural 'crown.' White fabric, gold trim, a red cape, and most exciting to Overdraw, silver armor make for a striking paladin outfit. Her gauntlets are a bit oversized, with long claws but also raised knuckles: weaponized armor. She still has a faint blush as she comes into view, but she effects a convincing heroic pose: a rose delicately balanced between two claws.

“I heard a lonely warrior princess was in need of company, so I came here right away.” The scaled tail strikes the ground with a gentle rattling noise. “And your beauty does not disappoint. I am sure there is poetry about you in your world.”

Overdraw blushes. “I.. uh... Yeah. Um... not poetry but... uh... fans do write...” She squirms a bit uncomfortably. “But is it really that obvious I'm lonely?”

“Your advert made it abundantly clear, my beautiful sunflower,” she says with a courteous bow. “And I intend to come to your rescue in such matters. A hero needs saving every now and then.”

A big dumb smile spreads across the amazonian's face. She lets out a flustered, “Y-Yes, but I do want to spar, first and foremost.”

The Pangolin Paladin delicately places the rose on a snowbank out of the way, keeping her present safe, before approaching the hero with a confident smile. “But of course, proud warrior.” Elie strikes a combat ready pose, tail lifted slightly, claw hands open and ready to scrap. “I intend to win the heart of this fair maiden in combat!”

“I... don't know about winning my heart in battle.” Overdraw summons her bow, and her wings flare to life. “But you are doing way better than everyone else thus far already! L-Let's Dance!”

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Flowing red and gold hair dance in the wind as archer and swordhand face off. Overdraw smiles, wiping the sweat from her brow. “One last exchange, Quinton, and then I need a break.”

Quinton's katana ignites again, and they go from their elegant pose into a crude swing as they

twirl. “Auto-Heart: Blazing Cutter!” They cry, closing the gap.

They are met with a kick to the chest by Overdraw. Already off balance, Quinton tumbles back and falls over. Reeling, they bring the blade up to defend, to find the hero extending a hand to help them back up. Quinton's blade disappears. They begrudgingly take Overdraw's hand.

“Alright, want some pointers?” Overdraw asks politely.

Quinton scowls before admitting, “I can hear you out.”

Overdraw holds her bow like a sword. “You want to have a stable stance. Being firm and balanced is important because it's where the power of your strikes comes from.”

“I know.”

“Yes, but you're not doing. I love, and I do mean *love* the cool attack names, but spinning and twirling... again looks cool, and you can do it, but you want to do it outside the range of your opponent unless it is critical. Like... you're surrounded or something.” Overdraw holds a stance and goes through a few simple demonstrations. “This is a really solid 'bread and butter' position. Your feet stay strong on the ground, you can reposition. Cut at multiple angles. Block from multiple angles.”

Quinton watches, frowning slightly. “Where did you learn?”

“My father,” she says. “Well, that and from my old and new job. I did a lot of research, and have fought a lot of people with katanas. The go-to weapon for Nightshade's goons, and Cold Snap loves her folded steel. Difference is the goon swords are mass produced crap that snap, unlike Cold Snap's. Huh, kinda ironic now that I think about it.”

They furrow their brow for a while. “And... your father. Was he an expert?”

“Hah. Nah, he was a dork, but a dork with a sword collection. We'd practice with bokens for exercise and fun. A nice 'manly' hobby to toughen me up.” Rebecca sighs before blushing, “Uh... not that... um... you see... uh... I... I didn't always look like this you see so... um... but... I-I'm a girl now and

he's supportive but it's—”

Quinton smirks. “It's alright, you don't need to explain yourself to me.” They re-summon their blade and hold it tight. “It took me a long time to find myself... I am not even sure if I have yet.”

Overdraw sighs. “Yeah... I can relate.” She dismisses her armor and her stance loosens to something more casual. “Anyway, I'd be happy to help you on your swordplay. I'm not an expert, but, as my dad says, you should never bring a weapon to a fight your opponent knows how to use better.”

A faint grin spreads across their lips. “And I'd be happy to receive the help. When it comes to blades, you're clearly quite... *sharp*.”

The pun catches her just right and she giggles uncontrollably. She dismisses her bow again as she snorts. “I wish I knew someone like you back home. You're great!”

They blush a bit. “Really? The pun wasn't even that good.”

Overdraw jokes back, “Maybe not, but I'm hardly going to *punish* you for it.” It gets a snort out of Quinton. Overdraw brings her tone down to something more serious. “But for real. You seem like a cool dude. The only people I know cool enough to call out their attack names are being paid to do it by their sponsors, which kinda makes it inherently less cool. You got a lotta heart in there... and suuuper pretty hair. Frankly, I'm jealous.”

Quinton can't repress the warm smile at first, but it slowly fades as they looks at Auto-Heart. “I... am sorry for you leading on.” They drift towards the stairs. “You are a wonderful change of pace, and deserve better. But I don't know if my heart is ready for this kind of thing. It is too torn in too many directions.”

“... Eh?” Overdraw looks confused. “I... I don't know what brought this on, but... I would be happy to hang out again. I'll look into buying a sword so we can have proper sword practice!” She waves at them.

Quinton keeps walking, but calls back. “Then I'll see you later for another round.”

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0. “Uh oh!” The green die whips up a wicked whirlwind, launching the pink tailed redhead away. The chaos demon tumbles before standing sideways on a cliff side, using the tremendous wind to keep her righted at her strange angle.

“Looks like you can really blow me away Blondie~” She wiggles her eyebrows suggestively.

The airborne Overdraw is positively crimson as she summons a blue arrow. Even this demon's fumbles are turned into flustering flirtations. “S-Stop it Ms. Scythe! I'm already at my flirt quota for a year!” She loses her grip on the arrow and it is lost to the slowly dissipating whirlwind.

Scythe giggles as she twirls her dagger and it effortlessly shape-shifts into her namesake. She falls up, tumbling as she levitates, clearly taking this all casually. “So I take it you're not into boys. Or at least haven't played with too many, given how you handled that shaft.”

“Y-You can't say that!” Overdraw squeaks, nocking an arrow and taking a shot.

“Whaaat~” She says, effortlessly slipping out of the way of the attack. “I'm clearly talking about the arrow shaft. What a dirty little mind in that shiny armor.”

Overdraw, lost in her own blush, squeaks. “You know, I'd be more likely to b-believe you about ten dirty jokes back and—” Scythe tosses a black die mid conversation. “I was talking! That's rude!”

“I just can't help myself today, it seems~” Scythe says with a shrug. “... Huh, another zero. What are the odds. Looks like I spent all my luck on seeing your sexy—”

Ping! The black die launches itself into the air in front of Scythe like an over-tuned Bouncing Bettie before exploding, causing her to tumble out of the sky. Overdraw dives to help her, but finds the demon, a little banged up, floating just above the ground.

“Aw, you came for me. Most people do~” She winks.

Overdraw seems to reach her limit as she summons a blue and white arrow, mixing them together and letting them loose on Scythe, her face as red as a tomato.

Scythe quickly tosses a pink die. “And she stopped bantering, that's not good!” It comes up: 6. A pink shell forms around Scythe just in time to be bombarded with burst arrows. “Right, good job number six, over-performing, that looked like it could have been—”

Overdraw summons more combo arrows and keeps up the bombardment. Her wings start to flicker but the barrier cracks and eventually breaks. The hero does not stop, switching to uncombined arrows, unloading shattering white volleys until she runs out of magic. She falls to the ground, her arrowhead ejecting, reducing her to Rebecca.

Scythe, clearly in immense pain as her outfit is shredded, looks over. A slightly wicked grin grows on her face.

Rebecca groans. “Don't.”

“Was it good for you too?”

“UUUUUAAAHG”

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“Time! Time out!” Overdraw protests. She gasps for air.

The rapidly teleporting rabbit woman stops her assault. She pulls up her goggles and looks at the hero expectantly. Tan skin a few shades lighter than her leather armor, blue and pink hair reflect in her blade. The machine she carries feels anachronistic compared to the otherwise relatively low tech of her main kit.

“Yeah, uh, you're doing fine, Varila. Just... going really hard.” Overdraw pants. “It's just sparring and... I just went probably way too hard with the last person, but... even then. Did I do

something that pissed you off? Whatever it is, I didn't mean it.”

Varila crosses her arms. “Yeah, I understand, you're just looking for a casual thing. But I'm not interested in a date, I'm interested in training seriously.”

“A d-date?”

The rabbit woman does not stop, talking right over Overdraw. “I'm not letting anything distract me from the prize at the end. There is no point in me training at half power.” She crosses her arms.

“Yeah! There is! Making sure your sparring partner survives! I've been getting tired of the constant proposals and romancing of the other people that showed up, and at first this was a breath of fresh air but... I only have so much in me. I haven't had time to get acclimated to the *constant* teleportation.”

“And neither will my opponents,” she says. “Now are we continuing or are we done?”

“So your plan is to hope they haven't dealt with someone that can teleport before? Most of my local jobbers don't teleport, but I know in Milwaukee they have a clown that does portal shenanigans. If I had to deal with him daily, I'd be more than ready to deal with this.” Overdraw presses on, “We have people from all over the multiverse here. Whatever it is... that is so important to you. Are you gonna gamble it on the hopes that your opponents won't know what they're doing?”

“Are we continuing or are we done?” Varila repeats firmly.

“Christ, l-look. I don't mean to make this a problem or anything but... if this wish was for something I want... I really really want, I wouldn't take any chances. It doesn't need to be teleporting. Someone that makes duplicates can do similar things. Or people that are really really fast, like disappear and reappear in the blink of an eye fast.”

“I don't need the lecture! I can't leave anything to chance. I...” She looks away, sheathing her katana. “I lost my other half. My better half. It is lost out there, somewhere. This vast, spinning, endless multiverse has one version of one person that completes me. Be honest, do you even begin to know

what that is like?"

Overdraw recoils for a moment before looking away. "No.... No I don't." She says, sounding defeated. She dismisses her bow and armor.

There is a long quiet pause while Varila stands, looking down the stairs she teleported up, arms crossed.

"Leaving nothing to chance." After a deep breath, she looks to Overdraw. "Ok, I'm only going to take it slow this one time so you can follow along, and then I'm going back to my full pace. No mercy. Keep up as best as you can."

"Yes Ma'am." Overdraw salutes and resummons her armor.

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A hot burst of fire on a snow bank. Another plume of steam. Visibility was obscured for Overdraw, but that was hardly a detriment to the sleek black magi-tech cyborg. The purple glow of runes lighting up along the armor gives away the enemy location. Overdraw nocks an arrow before a spinning shuriken of a lotus flower cuts through the steam, striking her and making her magic arrow fizzle and fail.

"Fuck." Overdraw groans as a bit more of her limited magic is wasted. She was fast learning that these 'purity flowers' were a major problem. This fight had been stressful and arduous. Even as frustration builds, there is a grin on her lips. "Sorry bout the language. You are putting up one hell of a fight, Banafsaj. How are you tracking me through the steam? I thought you might have been following my wings last time."

"You can't expect your enemies to monologue their every secret to you, Rebecca Bowhart." The ominous high tech armor steps through the steam, her white lotus mask glistening from the mist. Vents along her body create heat mirages as she cools back down. She is unarmed save for a black staff with a solid amethyst octahedron floating at its tip. "Your choice of venue does suit me quite well though. And your propensity to chatter in a fight is useful."

“Useful?” Overdraw looks over her opponent. What is she missing?

The vents slowly return to ambient temperatures, and as they do, Banafsaj suddenly lunges forward throwing out two lotus flowers, and quickly following behind them. Overdraw reignites her wings and ducks around the sapping flowers, flying backwards as fast as she can. Banafsaj's leg connects with Overdraw's, the kick sending the hero tumbling into another snowbank.

Half dazed, Overdraw groans, noting a pattern aloud, “—and flare.” The gem floating at the tip of Banafsaj's staff turns from purple to red, and another gout of flames hits the snow in front of the hero, raising another steam cloud. She listens and hears the hiss of the heat vents. She fires a quick snap shot, using a bit of her precious magic to form a volley arrow. As the white glow of the arrow appears, there is a grunt of panic and purple lights flare along Banafsaj's suit, and a huge purity flower emerges as a shield, absorbing the magic arrow. Overdraw's wings wink out and her armor fades. She was running dangerously low.

Banafsaj paces as the vents on her suit whine, putting out a ton of heat. Overdraw smirks. “Oh, I get it now. For such a fancy suit, I had a laptop with the same problem.”

Banafsaj quirks her head to the side. “I get why you like to banter though. It gives you time to recharge. Perhaps it's a tool that I should use.” She slowly paces around, staff gripped, like a tiger prowling. “So which one of us is ready to go first?”

“You say that like you know. The answer might surprise you.” Overdraw cracks a cocky grin.

“I have a profile on you. Extensive. You have used a lot of your magic. We can end it here so you don't get hurt. I'll give you three seconds to respond.” Banafsaj holds up three fingers and silently counts down, the whine of the cooling vents on her suit slowly spinning down.

“You know what happened to the last person that was confident in the profile they had on me, right?”

The countdown hits zero. Banafsaj creates another steam smokescreen. Vents hiss. Overdraw

does not stand her ground like every other time. She gives it an all or nothing dash, the bow slipping down in her hands. She swings hard and there is a crunching noise, and then a crack, as the black plates break on the full force swing of the amazonian. The cyborg flies like a baseball, and lands in the metaphorical outfield.

“She wound up—” Overdraw cuts off her one liner in awe at her own strength. “Yeah, uh... Wow, uh... that was a lot harder than I meant. Let me just.” Her wings flicker for a moment before failing, the arrow ejecting from her arm as she uses the last drop of her magic. “Shoot! Yeah, uh... Banafsaj! Are you ok? I didn't mean to hit that hard!”

A rune encrusted gauntlet emerges from the snow with a thumbs up. Banafsaj sits up and calls back, “I will be fine! I am going to need to update your profile though!”

The anomalous cyborg picks herself up and brushes the snow off. She removes her mask, revealing a young face, her eyes with inhuman black sclera. Her warm smile seems to shift the tone. “No one told me that you're this cute when powered down.”

“No... not you too.” Rebecca groans, blushing.

“Also noting that you can't take a compliment. Anyway, worry not, I'm not interested. If you were a bit older, and I was a bit younger... even then I don't swing that way.”

“M-Me, older? You, younger?! I... I think I'm older than you think I am. And you have—”

Banafsaj heads off the misunderstanding. “I'm almost 40 years old.”

“I... uh... wow. Yeah... sorry, um... You look really young is all,” she says.

“In some ways it is true, though it is only a fifth of my lifespan.”

Overdraw just blinks as she does the mental math. “Okay... Yeah, ok that... I'm going to need a moment to unscramble myself.”

Banafsaj smiles. “Of course, it was good to get to know you, and not some stuffy profile version of you. We will have to do this again. As much as I'd love another go right now, I need to get this repaired.”

“Yeah, absolutely. I'd love to go another round... Just... if you see anyone coming up the mountain to fight... tell them I am gonna need like... five minutes to recharge... Whew.” She flops on the ground. “Alright... so... did I surprise you? A little bit?” Rebecca has a bit of a giddy grin.

Banafsaj trudges through the snow to sit beside the diminutive hero. “Very much so at the end. Very impressive. Even if I wasn't using a sparring load-out with a deprecated cooling system, I imagine you could give me quite the run for my money.” She clears her throat. “However, some notes.”

Rebecca nods. “Yeah... let me guess, I'm not rationing my magic well.”

“So you've gotten this feedback before?”

“Regrettably... it's just so hard. I really want to wish for infinite magic so I don't need to worry about it anymore.”

Banafsaj wags a finger. “No, no. A bigger battery is not a substitute for self-discipline.”

Rebecca groans. “Yeah... I guess you're right. I suppose infinite magic and better magic management would make me a better hero anyway.”

The cyborg gets a bit short with her. “That is not what I mean. If you are going to call yourself a hero, then selfishness and apathy are poison.”

Rebecca raises her voice, getting a bit defensive about it. “Hey, I'm... I'm not apathetic! Yeah, and it's not that easy. Anyway, hero work is a legally specific—”

“A hero is putting your own well being behind those in danger. And you know it. Cowardice is poison too.” Her harsh tone abates, and she leans in, a more gentle, human side coming to the surface. “I know there is tremendous passion and kindness in there, hidden beneath the selfish, scared, lazy

surface. Who poisoned you?”

Rebecca squirms. “So where did you learn to fight like that? Magic and martial and tech all rolled into one. If you came to my world, you could hit the big leagues in no time!”

Banafsaj sighs, giving Rebecca a disappointed glance, before turning her attention back on herself. She begins to remove broken bits of armor, revealing extensive augmentation beneath.

“It may be special where you come from, but this technology is standard issue for the universes I exist within. And sufficient training has made it an extension of myself. You are asking why a soldier can field strip a rifle. The wrong question. What makes me fight the way I do is what I have learned from my environment; I grew up in the wrong place at the wrong time.” She begins to make a few minor field repairs. “There is a lot that can be learned from life; from circumstances. You are good at beating yourself up, but you need to learn how to criticize yourself. When you learn the difference, then you can begin to grow.”

Rebecca clutches her arrowhead and curls up, still in the aftershocks of the criticism. “Is learning supposed to hurt?”

“Does a growth spurt ache? It hurts to grow. But you shouldn't fear it. It's natural.”

The two share a gentle smile, but Rebecca remains curled up and closed for now.

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“OVERDRAAAAAAW!” A young, red skinned woman with horns rushes up the steps, finishing the last bites of a waffle cone! “You! I am here to make all your problems disappear!”

Overdraw is laying in the snow, letting the cold ease her aching muscles. “... Who are you?”

“Y-You... you don't recognize me?” The devil woman seems wounded.

“... it's been a long day, and I have fought so many devil-adjacent people, and animal eared

people, and people with strange skin tones, and people that know my day... Day? Name... why did I say day—” She clears her throat. “Point is... I’m a bit fuzzy in the brain right now, so, I’m sorry, I don’t remember.”

She crosses her arms and pouts. “Emberstorm.”

“Oh! OOOH! I just... have met so many people from other worlds today I assumed you had to be... right! Right! You’re the Cambion with the mech.” She leans back. “Well, one rising star to another, I think you’re plenty cool. Did you get an invite?”

“An invite?” Emberstorm blinks. “No... I kinda... fumbled my way here? Pearlham is bringing up the mech right now. The stairs are small and the feet are big but... Pearly can figure it out!”

“Well, I’m glad to see you, I’ve had so many people trying to flirt and date me today, a dose of normalcy will be nice.” Overdraw groans as she gets up.

“What goofs, what goobers! They stand no chance.” Emberstorm grins and points to herself with both thumbs. “Unlike me~ Being from the same universe means we can actually carry this back home! Imagine the power couple we’d be!”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake.”

“Of course you might need to change organizations. But Eastside is waaay better anyway.” She has a goofy infectious grin.

“Sparring comes first!” Overdraw insists before she asks. “... Is Eastside... actually better?”

Emberstorm squeals excitedly. “Ooooh absolutely! We have amaaaazing facilities. Our training space is underground, and its, like, three football fields that, like, fold in on each other. And there is a staff only swimming pool that’s huuuge. And a little arcade room and— oh, uh, on-site housing. Super cheap too, probably more important, as well as—”

Overdraw raises her hand. “Wait, that’s not what I meant... I meant... uh... has your boss ever

asked you to do something... evil?"

"... uh... the boss isn't secretly a villain if that's what you mean."

"Yeah, no, not... Not illegal really. Just... something that you know you'll regret forever."

Emberstorm takes a moment to think about it. "I mean... he is pretty nice most of the time... but he's a bit of a hard ass... very much a stickler for the rules... I mean... I guess if there was a bad rule he'd probably stick with it. But he hasn't asked me to do anything abnormally evil."

Overdraw grimaces and mutters, "Not the most useful answer." She rubs her head. "Yeah, I mean... I guess... Let's just say not everything is great with my current boss, but I don't think I can leave. It's actually kinda—"

KAHTOOM. A massive metal body with a cute pig for a head lands between them. The robot pig ejects itself and spins around, oinking happily. "Pearlham! What an amazing entrance! Who's a good boy~"

Overdraw searches the sky, confused. "We... We're on a mountain! Where did he come from? Did... he charter a plane? Did he climb further up and get a heck of a running jump? How?"

"That's a great question~" Emberstorm crouches. "So how did you do it, Pearly?" The pig oinks and squeaks excitedly. "Really? Really... Oh! That's clever. What a smart piggy~." She rolls the robo pig over and gives him a quick belly rub. Satisfied, Pearlham bounces back into the mech. Emberstorm follows, quickly hopping into the pilot's seat.

Overdraw asks, "How did he—"

She is cut off by the mech awakening, and boosting like a rocket directly at Overdraw. "Here I come, cutie~" Overdraw's wings turn on as she flies out of the way, causing Emberstorm to crash into the side of a short cliff. "... ow..."

"I was asking a question." Overdraw huffs as she floats by.

The mech recovers slowly, stumbling around to find its target. “You said, 'fight first.' And I'm not in the habit of disappointing.” She grins as the mech begins to glow a warm tone. “Either way, I'm just getting fired up!” A ring of fire appears around the battlefield and plumes of flame pour out of the mech's exhaust.

Overdraw rolls her eyes, but smiles. “You know what... some good dumb fun is exactly what I need right now. You're on!”

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“So you could say you're *armed and dangerous*?” Overdraw grins, with a black eye and a bruise across her cheek, where the gray catgirl's metallic fist decked her.

Her opponent visibly cringes at the pun, but plasters on a fake smile. “Haha, good one Becky.” She says, playing her part. “I figure I can't bring anything too dangerous to the fight, so this is the closest thing I have to something sparring safe. But you are not using your weapon, so it should be fine, right?”

“Yeah, my bow? I mean... I could. It's sparring safe. The arrows are completely non-lethal,” Overdraw admits. “But you asked for unarmed and I figured that would only be fair, Nerassa.”

Nerassa grins maliciously, before pulling back to the friendly act. “Oh! I forgot, I have to make a change to my schedule. Forgive me, but my boss would get super pissed if I forget this, so I just need to make a little reminder. I'm sooo forgetful,” she says, as she digs out a notebook and jots down 'non-lethal arrows.' “But really, non-lethal arrows. How does that work.”

Overdraw grins, happy to share. “Oh, they're magical: they go right through flesh, and only hurt. I also have like... magic arrows, and like... special arrows like Volley and Seeker arrows that have the same collision logic. Burst arrows make a little non-lethal concussive blast that pushes people around, but hasn't killed anyone yet.”

“Really, is that all you can do?” Nerassa says, still taking notes, keeping up her bubbly happy

persona.

“Um... well you saw me fly and summon armor... can do the same thing with my bow. Oh... uh... I do have two other arrows but they are really too dangerous for me to use and too expensive, but in case of emergency. Flame arrows are what they sound like. They set stuff on fire. The Banish arrow is a bit more... wild, though.”

“Banish?” Nerassa pries.

“Yeah, uh... it sends things to a featureless, inescapable void... at least I don't think it can be escaped. I would never use it on a living person unless it was a last resort.”

Nerassa notes that one, and underlines it twice as she scowls. “That is... a problem.” Her mask slips for a moment as she looks up at her potential future opponent. Murderous intent sizes up the hero, seeming to rest on the unarmored hands.

Overdraw is none the wiser, looking up at the sky. “Yeah. If I could recover people from the void, it would be like a mobile holding cell. It's so frustrating.” She looks back down and Nerassa fixes her metaphorical mask. “That's a lot of writing. You ok?”

“Oh! Uh... My boss is a real stickler. Kinda a controlling bitch, if I'm honest.” Nerassa clears her throat, looking at Overdraw's exposed palms. “Let's get back to the sparring. I think I have an idea.”

“Alright, ready when you are.” Overdraw takes a solid stance. “This time your metal sucker punch won't catch me off guard.”

Nerassa rushes, reckless and open, throwing a punch past the amazonian's guard, but hesitates for a moment, giving the hero time to react. There is a grin on her lips as Overdraw grapples her and throws her harmlessly into a snowbank.

Nerassa smiles, playing dazed. “Wow, you're very impressive!” She extends a hand to get helped up.

Overdraw looks down and extends a hand to the cat girl. There is a tiny click and a small needle pops out of Nerassa's open palm as she maintains eye-contact with the hero.

“Oh, this is nothing, my partner is waaaay scarier than me.”

Nerassa grimaces, glancing down her at boobey-trapped hand and bites her lip. The needle retracts. She takes the helping hand. “... you don't say. Why don't you tell me all about her?”

“Uh... she's very cagey about personal information with me. Everyone else says she's super conversational but...” She hauls Nerassa up and lets go of her hand. “Anyway, if you're having a hard time contacting your boss, you could always go to Shatter Sugar Connection Cafe. I've been in there a lot. My boss is also a total bastard type so I need to keep checking in and stuff. Prices are fair.”

Nerassa furrows her brow. “Is sensitive information safe on that line?”

Overdraw nods. “I know the owner... sorta. Anyway, she said it is super secure. Once the booth closes, you have total privacy. And thank goodness. I've said some stuff I'd never want anyone else to hear in there.”

“Shatter Sugar you say... I'll have to check it out,” she says, flipping through her notebook to a page noting businesses she's seen while walking through the Crossroads. She underlines a tech hobby store, and Shatter Sugar. “Thank you so much... now, what were you saying about your partner?”

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“Doing great Rikka!” Overdraw shouts encouragements to the raven winged girl. She nocks another spirit arrow. “You're doing really well!”

Rikka ducks and dives, her wings flapping double time as she tries to dodge the next shot. “I don't need to be told that! I didn't even want to do this! It's Niko's idea!”

The lightning bug boy watching from the sidelines calls out, “You're welcome! Finding a rumor of an archer looking to spar was extremely lucky. Especially one with dummy arrows.”

Overdraw ignites her wings. “Alright, I’m going to increase the difficulty a bit. The arrows can come from any angle.”

Rikka groans, taking a moment to breathe. “Fine, but I’m going to need a break soon. Also, do you have any arrows that don’t fucking hurt like feathers being plucked in a vinegar bath!?”

Overdraw pauses. “I... actually don’t know what my least painful arrow is. The Banish arrow was painless... to be in the effect radius was at least. The Burst arrows don’t hurt much when I use them on myself, but I’m in armor most of the time...” She snaps out of her muttered monologue. “I probably shouldn’t test which is most painful right now.”

As she rambles, she takes off, her magical flight letting her zip circles around the raven winged girl. Overdraw nocks an arrow and fires, then nocks another one and firing at a different angle, repeatedly, creating a hellish zone of projectiles. Rikka ducks and dives and twirls, instincts kicking in, but under sustained fire it just takes one mistake; a spirit arrow passes through a wing and it spasms, causing her to dip into the line of fire of another arrow.

Overdraw stops firing and dives to catch Rikka. The raven girl squirms in the hero’s arms as an automatic reaction, slapping Overdraw as she takes hold, and hitting her hard enough to disorient her a moment. She tries to pull up, but not having enough time, instead rolls over and skids across the ground on her back to spare Rikka.

The hero pants. “Ok... ok. Rikka... are you— ngh... hurt?” She winces in pain as she tries to get up. “Maybe... it’s a good time to take that break.”

Niko rushes over. “Rikka! Are you ok?!” His hands begin to glow, getting ready to heal.

Rikka groans, “I’m fine! I’m fine! Just... Bow-Lady! Why’d you do something dumb like that?!”

Overdraw seems a little surprised to be admonished. “I’m not just gonna let a kid get hurt!” There is a long pause. Silence takes hold as Overdraw reads their expressions. She has seen this look before. “... I’m sorry. For whatever is going on in your life. Do you want to talk about it?”

Rikka grimaces and pushes off of the downed hero. “Shut up, Over... Over-something,” she digs for an insult that doesn't come immediately.

Overdraw goes to get up and winces. “Christ-mas! My back hecking hurts.” She shoots the two of them a thumbs up. “Don't worry. Old Overdraw has been through much—”

“OLDVERDRAW!” Rikka says, finding her insulting nickname.

“Hah... Yeah... I guess... Guess I'm no longer 'kids these day,’” she says, taking it in stride.

Niko raises his hands. A sphere of light shines over the hero and the runaway. There is a distinct pop as Overdraw's body rights itself in the healing light. “Forgive my friend... We have been through a lot, so it is hard to trust people.”

Overdraw nods. “Yeah... trust.” She thinks it over, and ejects her arrow, shrinking back down to the diminutive Rebecca: still taller than the teens, but only barely. “Well, then I'll make the first move. Overdraw is my hero name, but my real name is Rebecca. I was born in Madison, Wisconsin, raised in Oregon, Wisconsin. Not to be confused with Oregon the state. And I've been through a bit myself... but I won't pretend like I even come close to a monopoly on sorrow. I had more than a lot, growing up. And... I have been a bad person at times. I still am, but I want to be better.” She sits down in front of the teens, letting them be taller. “You don't need to tell me anything about yourselves. I certainly don't deserve your trust.”

Rikka seems to soften for a moment as Rebecca makes herself vulnerable. Niko sits down next to Rebecca. “It is ok... I do not have anything better to do with what time I have.” Rebecca looks over slightly horrified, reading between the lines. Niko notices and wears a sad smile. “I will be fine,” he lies, voice cracking a bit, before admitting, “I... don't know how long I have... I'm cursed.”

Rikka butts in, “Niko!”

“Like I said, it is fine. There is nothing Overdraw can do to me that worries me.” He sighs and pulls his legs up in front of himself, hugging his knees.

Rebecca gently pats his knee. "It's ok. I'll give you and your friend as much time as you need. You are in a different bracket, it seems, so we're not competing for a wish. And then you can break your curse and go back to... uh... normal life."

"Exactly!" Rikka pleads, looking at Niko.

Niko denies it. "No... there is something more important. Our 'normal life' is runaways on the street." He leans back and looks to the setting sun. "I am not going to live forever; wish or no wish. I want that wish to go towards something we need so much more. A place where we can live happily as long as we can. A stable, happy, comfortable, warm home."

Rebecca looks like she's been stabbed. Tears well up, and run down her cheeks. Her soft, sagely act is shattered. "A... home... more than your life..." she croaks out. "I.. I'm so sorry."

Rikka looks down at Overdraw and sighs. She sits down, wings retracting. "... Uh... Don't worry. I'm going to save Niko. We'll find some other way to geta home."

It only seems to intensify Rebecca's sobbing. "I... I don't... I can't... I just..." She sputters in her breakdown.

Niko sighs and puts a hand on Rebecca's knee. "Maybe... you want to talk about it?"

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A green haired bunny girl steps up to see Rebecca lying down on a rocky clearing. The little hero looks drained. "Hello? I'm looking for a tall blonde hero girl, have you seen her?"

Rebecca groans. "Yeah... a hero... I wonder where she is." The weight of the day has started to pile on her. Exhaustion, emotional and physical, dragging the mood down. "I'm Overdraw... but I'm not really feeling the part right now. I'm just... really tired... and I'm wondering if I should even be here."

"Well, I'm Toffee and... oooh boy can I relate. But this whole thing is supposed to be a fun time,

right?” She asks, slowly approaching. “Can I just say, you're a lot taller on your profile~” She says in a playful tone.

Rebecca chuckles, “Yeah... Yeah, I've heard that one before. Can you blame me? No one is interested unless you're at least six foot or six figures.” After a pause, she shoves the arrowhead in her arm and returns to full size. “Tada... Overdraw. In the flesh. Sorry if I'm not up to a fight.”

“Bout that... I was wondering if it had to be a fight-fight. I don't know if you're into this kinda thing but... I have a deck of cards and thought it might be fun to just... play a game.” Toffee gives a slightly sheepish grin.

Overdraw smiles gently. “I would like that.” She sits up and dusts the snow off of herself. “By the way... uh... Since I'm not really doing 'hero stuff'... you can call me Rebecca. Or Becca. Or my friends call me Becky. Whatever you want really, except Robert.”

Toffee Grins. “Alright Beck~ Ever play Gin Rummy?”

“No, but I'd love to learn. As a game designer— well. I'm an ex-game designer. Anyway, I love learning new games.”

“A game designer?” She says with a grin. “Whatcha make?”

Rebecca bashfully admits, “Oh, uh... I don't know if the Swords and Sorcery series exists in your world... but, uh, worked on a lot of those. I actually really love the series.” She gets excited, getting lost in old memories. “I actually got my start in ROM hacks of Saigo no Nokoribi. It was localized as Swords and Sorcery: Blazing. SaS:B was huuuuge, and like... the second game to get localized but the localizers cut sooo much content, so I wanted to find a way to play the stuff I was missing. Sure enough, someone had hacked up a patch that put all the Japan-exclusive content in. From there I started finding other people's hacks, and decided I wanted to make my own. Archers got like... mega fucked in that entry so I made a hack that re-balanced them, called 'Blazing Bow'. But like... it got three downloads. So I rolled it into a more ambitious hack where I made a new campaign. The story was like... super ass. I would never write it again, but that got the community's attention. From there I was known as 'Redraw' online. I got reaaally popular for a bunch of gender swap hacks. I had a friend

that liked to do fan art. I wonder what she's up to. But, like, it connected with me and... huh... probably was a clue I should have realized sooner... anyway—”

Overdraw pauses and blushes. “I’m sorry... uh... sorry... I’m rambling, aren’t I.”

Toffee giggles, “Yep, but you don’t have to stop. I like hearing about it.”

Overdraw rubs her arm bashfully. “Anyway, uh... I... I kinda...” Having lost her momentum she looks away. “Um... But it was a long time ago now. I don’t really do this kinda thing anymore.”

“Hero work have you too busy?” Toffee asks as she takes out her deck and shuffles it.

“Yeah... well... no...” Overdraw squirms. “Well, I got a degree, and got hired by the American branch of the people that make the actual games. And... it was soooo much stress getting in, and once I was in it was sooo much stress keeping my job. I bent over backwards for my boss. I worked overnight, I did everything by the book, I... I really tried. But one day, I was like... at the end of my rope. I was fresh off a double all nighter when I was let go for 'budgetary concerns'. All my stuff from my desk was put in a box while I was on break, and I was shown the door.”

Toffee groans. “That’s rough...”

“What’s worse is when I was fired I could only feel relieved. I lost my dream job and I was smiling. It’s fucked up.”

Toffee ponders it. “Well... your dream job. You could always go indie.”

“Yeah, I tried to make flash games but... I don’t know, I just wasn’t feeling it. Before I was fired, I went looking for inspiration, and... I found the arrowhead that gave me my powers and... like... I got to be the game character. The protagonist. It feels so good to fly and to fight and...” Overdraw sighs. “Maybe... I’m just being selfish, though. Like... dating the person that’s been crushing on you the moment you feel single or lonely... but, professionally. I don’t know, am I even making sense?”

Toffee smiles and assures her, “Well I’m following along, so it’s not nonsense. I guess, at the end

of the day... would you help people even if it wasn't fun?"

"I... think so." She sighs and crosses her arms under her chest. "I... don't know if I know for certain anymore, though. I've had a lot more than just a physical workout today."

Toffee starts to deal. "Then how bout I teach you my favorite game, and you can take your mind off things for a bit. A little brain vacation, away from hero things, and work things. Let's just have some fun."

"That sounds like... exactly what I need." She stretches. "Alright! Thank you."

>>—>

Ascending the stairs is a white haired woman with a stylish red jacket, holding a glave. Beside her steps an imposing entity: a titanic charcoal golem with the glow of magma running through its body, with clawed feet and hands, blackened sclera with burning pupils, and horns that just scream 'final boss.'

Overdraw seems refreshed. "Alright, I can take you two at a time."

The entity growls, "Thou shall not be facing me in combat, nor will you be courting me. I am here at request of mine ally, Kiriata." His voice booms.

Kiritara chuckles. "Don't worry about Azta. He's a bit grumpy right now. But yeah, he's just gonna say a bit if we fight, and be on his way."

"Therefore I insist we commence with combat first so I need not loiter while you two... court."

Overdraw blushes, "Court? This keeps happening today." She sighs. "Alright, well, I'm past bargaining now. As long as we spar. I'm recharged and ready to go."

Kiri nods, and Azta groans, understanding exactly what his partner wants. "*Facing her enemies head-on, her spirit cannot be repressed,*" Azta says in his best announcer voice.

Kiri shoots Azta a grin, before turning back to Overdraw, and extending the reference. She twirls her halberd. *“Looks like I’ll have to teach you a lesson!”*

Overdraw laughs and claps, “I get it! That’s great... wait... uh... let me think of... Uh. *Wind, guide me!*”

Kiri laughs. “We are such dorks.” Azta turns and begins to walk back. “He has god stuff to do, don’t worry about him.”

“Yeah, I... uh... ‘god stuff?’ I... You know what? With the roller coaster of a day I’ve been having, sure, god stuff.” Overdraw summons her bow and wings.

“More importantly, he gets uncomfortable when I call cute tall girls like you cute and tall,” Kiri says with a grin.

Overdraw blushes, and hesitates to fly back as Kiri charges in, aiming her blade for Overdraw’s armor. It rings out across the mountain side, causing Overdraw to spin and flounder, eating dirt as the up she was about to fly in becomes down, and she flies face down into the ground. Overdraw rolls over on her back and nocks a volley arrow and fires it at Kiri, who dives out of the way.

“Also, your blush only makes you cuuuter~” Kiri teases as she recovers, dancing and ducking out of the way of another spirit arrow volley.

“C-Can you please not like... I-I’m trying to focus,” Overdraw squeaks as Kiri carves a dead zone in the volley with her pole-arm.

The white haired woman grins. “But it’s fun. Anyway, why don’t you just retaliate in kind?”

“In k-kind. You mean... flirt with you?” the hero says, finding a new level of crimson.

“It’s clearly an effective tactic.”

Overdraw's blush begins to spread down her neck as she thinks. "I-I think you a-a-are... very... attractive."

Kiri can't help but giggle a bit. "Positively sweeping me off my feet. This amazoness is a proper Casanova~"

"I'm trying, I've never been good at flirting!" Overdraw squeaks.

Kiri giggles as she twirls weapon her around, shouldering it for a moment to grin. "It's easy, just take a compliment and add confidence." She gestures at Overdraw. "Like you're pretty tall; compliment. But add the confidence and; Damn honey, you go all the way up~"

Overdraw is completely frozen as she seems to reach critical. "I-I-I-mean-I-'m-not-even-normal-tall-cause-magic-thing-thingy."

Kiri sighs and walks over. "But we're also still fighting so... bap~"

"Wh-huh-I-eep!" Kiri swings the handle into the dazed Overdraw, snapping her out of it.

"Gotta focus, but the little look on your face when you start daydreaming is precious~" Kiri teases.

Right back to stunned. "H-Hold up I—" Overdraw barely blocks this time.

"It's amazing! I can stun lock you with compliments. You look great in that armor, but you'd look great in anything~" WHAM! Another gong-ringing smack on the armor, this time delivered with a kick.

"Yield! Yield! Too much!"

>>——>

A warrior makes her way to the top of the mountain. The pale blue woman holds a titanic

hammer in her hand, heavy armor clattering. Her eyes closed, a mechanical mono-eye on her forehead, but her face looks slightly nervous. “Hello? Is this the place with the lonely warrior I kept hearing about?”

Overdraw groans. “Yes... I don't know why everyone keeps saying I'm lonely, though.” The hero grumbles as she gets up. “Please... please... after last match, please tell me you are not here to flirt, or to court, or to make dirty jokes. I just want to fight.”

The armored woman tilts her head in confusion. “No... I read the poster. It was phrased strangely, but... you were requesting single combat, right? But not too hard, just to practice.”

“Yes! Thank you... uh... I didn't catch your name.”

“I am Quin.” She shuffles forward, looking uneasy.

“Well, pleased to meet you. Your outfit looks very cool! You must be fun at conventions.”

“Conventions?” Deadpan, Quin freezes for a moment in bafflement.

“Yeah, right, probably don't have them where you're from. Kinda... big geek social gathering event things,” Overdraw tries to explain.

“I... think I am more confused now.” Quin's voice is a uneasy whisper.

“Right, uh. Sorry, I have just gotten kinda used to everyone being chatty today,” Overdraw says. “We can get right into fighting if you want.”

“It... might be for the best.” Quin grips her hammer a bit tighter. “I just had... a few questions about the advert that Saki couldn't answer.”

“Yeah! Of course! I'm an open book... mostly. So questions about hero work? Magic?”

“What do you mean by 'Glider Momma?’” The frozen soldier asks trepidatiously.

Overdraw blushes. “Oh! Yeah! Uh... yeah, that sounds... strange now that I think about it. Sugar Gliders.”

Quin stares with her mono-eye, awaiting an explanation still.

“Uh, they are my pets. They are... Oh! Wait.” Overdraw dismisses her armor and fumbles her phone out of her jacket pocket. nearly dropping it. “I got pictures~”

She flips open the phone and taps the keys, reaching her gallery, revealing cute, tiny marsupials with a flying-squirrel-like membranes. “These are my little babies. The two paler ones are Cream and Peaches, I got them first. They're sisters. Cream is big protective sis, meanwhile Peaches is... just the biggest dumbass. I cannot take my eyes off her for a moment. Last time I did she tried to eat scented candles. The only one of my babies to try and stow away on one of my patrols.

“The one with the black pattern I got later. Her name is Cookies and she is a sleepy little girl. Like... I took her to the vet to make sure she was healthy, lethargy can be like... seriously a problem for sugar gliders. Vet says she's got a clean bill of health. She just laazy. Lil lazy baby~” She flips over to a picture of Cookies napping on top of an orange slice. And then flips to the next picture of her still 'napping' while licking and nibbling at the orange.

“... Cute.” Quin says, pacified. “Do... you have more pictures?” She shoulders her hammer, getting invested.

“Do I have more pictures?! Yeah! Tons! I love my babies.” She flips through them. “This is Cream's adoption anniversary. In the background you can see Peaches trying to land on the moving ceiling fan. Then here is a picture of Cookies and my Grandpa... and... Yeah, there's Peaches in the background trying to eat spaghetti. And here is one of Peaches not currently trying to meet the grim reaper. You can tell because she's sleeping.”

Quin sighs, smiling. “It is so... happy.” She looks to her heavy armored hands. “They look... fragile.”

Overdraw nods. “Yeah, though you wouldn't know it from the antics Peaches gets up to.”

“I don't know if I could trust myself with something that delicate.” Quin grimaces, a hand instinctively moving to clutch her hammer.

The hero looks over the soldier, and seems to understand. “Well, perhaps something a bit bigger, more rough and tumble.” She flips through pictures over and over. “My aunt has a Nufie... uh... Newfoundland. Big dogs bred for water rescue up in, like... well... Newfoundland. Thus the name.” She pulls up a picture of a big dork of a dog that is bigger than the woman holding the leash. “You'd still need to be careful but... yeah. It's a pet you don't need to be worried about... squishing.”

Quin stares at it, and her smile grows. Her body language finally begins to open up. “Thank you. I will keep this in mind moving forward.”

Overdraw grins, summoning her bow, and tucking away her phone. “Alright, well, we can talk more about animals after we go a round. Let's have a little fun with this, ok?”

>>——>

A scuffed up woman in white and gold walks down the mountain with an exhausted Overdraw, making their way to the Oni Springs. There is an awkward silence that hangs in the air between them.

Overdraw lances the silence, “So, Lyla—”

“I might have gotten a bit rough, sorry. I was just... trying to figure out how I feel about it, but... as long as you're happy.” Lyla says.

Overdraw blinks. “Yeah, I... I think... Um, what?” Visible confusion sits just outside of Lyla's peripheral vision.

“It's ok. So... did you meet anyone special today?” Lyla asks gently, wringing her hands a bit.

“Yeah, uh... a lot of them—”

“I see...”

Overdraw hesitates before continuing. “It's been a fun day with a lot of ups and downs... from people I can't wait to see again, to others that were being super forward and flirty, and others that just showed up to chat or... watch in one robot's case.”

That seems to elicit a crimson blush and a very confused noise from Lyla's lips. “W~w~uh~ wwell that is... certainly a day.” She clears her throat and sighs. “Just... I don't know... I guess I'm just upset because I thought... last night might have been special. But I don't want to lock you down or anything. I just want you to be happy.”

Overdraw blushes back. “Well... I'm very happy right now. And... last night was pretty special. Today was just a different kind of fun time. I wouldn't even say today was anything special.”

Lyla's blush is renewed. “Really? Not special? I... I didn't think you were that kind of girl.”

“I mean, it kinda comes with the territory of my line of work.”

“Uh... that is surprising.”

“Yeah, uh, not really. Usually its a big thing with the whole team. Sometimes it's learning from someone more experienced in the training room, or a quick match with a newbie to show them the ropes. The best is when I'm going with someone about on my level. Those can last for hours and are so satisfying to come out on top of... except uh... when I don't.”

Lyla begins to fan herself. “W-Wow that is... uh... a lot more than I was... um... uuuuh.”

“I mean it really doesn't end there. Most of the low level, in it for the money villains basically fall into the same camp. It's usually fun when we go at it.” She sighs. “Some of them are real sweethearts, and it's almost never the ones you'd expect. Sylaburn's a bit of an asshat, especially after my new sponsorship, but he's not that bad really. Cold Snap is probably the most normal looking and dangerous person I deal with on a regular basis. And Radigator, big like... 8 foot tall radioactive

alligator man? We get along really well. It's always a treat when he's around.”

Lyla pauses, stunned, face absolutely crimson, overwhelmed. “You... and... you mean to say also... with your rogues gallery... I mean... If... is your type... I mean to—”

“I mean... of course I fight my villains. It's literally my job.” Overdraw says a bit concerned. “... What do you think I meant?”

“Wait, so... you aren't... 'seeing' the other heroes? You are fighting them?”

“Yeah, sparring is great! We have a new guy that has some real potential, and he's always lining up to take a crack at the warrior witch!”

“And this whole thing on the mountain was just—”

“An invitation to spar. Why?” Overdraw asks, getting increasingly concerned.

Lyla blushes and buries her face in her hands. Her light duplicate comes out to physically guard her from the perceived threat of emotional damage, but fades as she starts laughing. “I'm sorry! I don't get out much, when I read your ad I thought you were looking for a lover as well as a fight.”

Overdraw groans, “Yeah, there were some people that just wanted to fight, but they were being weird about it, but others were being like...hyper flirty, so... maybe it's not just you.”

Lyla lets out a sigh of relief. “Alright, I was worried. On your ad, perhaps you shared a bit too much, were a bit too intimate, and mentioning you are single at the end certainly gave me the wrong idea.”

“Yeah I... sorry, I did what? Was... I... I don't remember writing anything like that.” Overdraw rubs her head. “Was there anything strange about that last line?”

Lyla crosses her arms. “... Well.. uh... no offense but, it was a lot easier to read than the rest of it. I assumed you must have been excited and rushed through the majority of it?”

“Someone vandalized my poster! No wonder! Ugh...” She droops. “I worked really hard on it, too.”

Lyla blushes and taps her fingers together. “Oh... well... even if it wasn't intentional... was there anyone? In hindsight.”

The hero shrugs. “I mean... a few were ok. A few were very nice. Quite a lot of non-starters. Honestly I don't know. I don't know what my future with anyone here looks like if I go home when this is done.” After a little pause she gives Lyla a playful punch on an uninjured shoulder. “But you're on the higher end of that list. On the mountain, it was just sparring to me. This 'lets hit the hot springs afterwards.' This is special.”

The two share a warm smile as they walk off into the night.

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Episode Sugar Glass: Nostalgia

"There's not much I know about you

Fear will always make you blind

But the answer is in clear view

It's amazing what you'll find face to face"

Daft Punk. "Face to Face." *Discovery*.

Everything exactly right. Table cloth set, flowers arranged to the side, not so many as to be too forward, but just enough to get the point across. Dress? Dress! Sugar Glass fumbles her way out of her apron, to check over her dress. A bit wrinkled: it had gotten bunched up in the back of her closet without her noticing.

Donk-donk. The sound of someone tapping on the glass of the closed door to the Shatter Sugar Cafe. Sugar Glass rounds excitedly, but sighs, and rolls her eyes upon seeing Caine. The smart dressed psychic waves happily, but with a stern pout on seeing the baker's disappointment. She sighs again before smiling and opening the door.

She greets him warmly. "Hey, sorry, was just expecting someone else." She spins about. "How do I look?"

"Stunning, as always. I was just going to ask about the catering order for the after tournament party I was volunteered for. However, I don't think I've ever seen you this dressed up." He pauses and looks her over. "Are you feeling—?"

"Why, do I look sick? Tired?"

"Stressed, Val. You look stressed. Which is something I never thought I'd see." He hesitates, looking around for a moment, taking it all in before smiling. "Perhaps a little peek into the future? It's been a while since we've done a reading. A little something to prepare for your date?"

"Date? No. It's a post round celebration for an old friend is all," Val squeaks. "But I suppose a

quick reading won't hurt." She ushers him in. "What do I owe you?"

"Just to be honest with me and yourself. Ok?" He sits down and takes out his cards. "Now... is it a date? Or a celebration? I need to know to make sure I do the right—"

Val groans. "It is a celebration... probably. It's Schrodinger's first date. If it goes well, then yay, it was our first date. If we don't click, it is fun with a new friend. And if it goes poorly... it was a mistake."

Caine fans out the cards, and Val begins to pick them. "Harsh words coming from you. They must have quite the stake in your heart."

Val groans, as Caine sets out the six cards in order. "I... I don't know, it's messy. She is absolutely my type. Big and beefy, but like sweet... and kinda a mess. But like a lost kitten kinda mess, where she's all the more adorable for it. But she's also Bobby's widow. She reminds me a lot of him, too."

"And that's a good thing?" The psychic sighs, "Messy. Alright, let's hope I can clear this up for you. Seems like you have a lot of nostalgia clouding your thoughts. I remember you had some pretty unsavory things to say about Robert when you pressed past the nostalgia at our first reading."

"But she's a different person completely," Val says dismissively. "And tonight is about her and I, not about Bobby."

Caine bites his tongue, and flips over the first card. "To be expected: The World. You are on top of it. Your business is doing well. You finally have everything figured out. You're a respected member of our community. And now the past has come back in a way you feel you can handle. Closure you never thought you could get, delivered with a silver bow."

Without any objections, Caine flips over the next card. "As suspected: The High Priestess. You claim that this isn't about Robert, but the cards do not lie. You are hunting for closure, seeking answers. You want to find out what you missed. The great and horrible what ifs. This competitor is a bridge to those answers."

Val pushes back on it. "I'm honestly just interested in her. What makes you think otherwise? Maybe you just misread the card."

"Dead certain. Because you flirted with me up until my mask slipped. You were interested in basically the opposite of what you just claimed your type to be," he says firmly. "Haven't made a move on me since, even with the mask back up. You want someone genuinely confident to their core."

Val grimaces. "Ok, but she is really hot, and really nice, and hunting for my type hasn't paid off."

"And it's fine. I didn't say you weren't interested in her. Just not solely on her own merits," Caine says, walking it back a bit. "Next Card?"

"Please."

"Your fears are," he turns over the card, "The Wheel of Fortune. It is far too obvious. You have no control over the truth. It is random chance. You are playing roulette with your—"

"Ok, ok, next." She grows more impatient.

Caine frowns. "I'm getting there." He turns the next card over. "The Emperor. Your boon is your charisma. You can get people to say and do what you want. If you want your closure, you can get it. But the truth may hurt quite a bit. You're at your Zenith, the only way to go is down, after all."

"I get it, this could suck a lot," Val says, getting increasingly uncomfortable.

"And we're not even at the troubles you'll face yet." He turns over the next card. "Temperance... that is an interesting one. It could mean you have rivals, or competition... but I think this may be more tied to the previous card. You may be your biggest enemy in getting to your own goals. If you are not careful, you could convince your guest to speak in half truths, to get her to say what you want to hear, or choose to hear what you want of it."

Val crosses her arms, but mulls it over for a while. “I suppose... I do bowl people over. I can try to be a bit more reserved.”

Caine smiles. “There we go.” He turns over the last card and a spark of panic flickers in his eyes. “Well this has been fun. I should get going.” He tries to scoop up the cards.

Val hollers, “Hey! You can't just dip like that. What's the last card? That's supposed to predict the most likely outcome, right? What does The Devil mean. I don't think it has come up in our previous readings.”

Caine plays up a grimace before sitting down. “Ok... so... The Devil is usually a portent of doom. This will not go well. Last chance to change course. And... I wish I could disagree with it. But you haven't been yourself since Rebecca came into your life.”

“You... You've known who it was the entire time?” She asks.

“Honey, with your style, I could pick you out of a crowd... such as a stadium full of people. Unless you were there to see Zeke, or Pandora, but I suspected it was the big amazonian hero that caught your eye. The one that comes from a similar world.”

He continues, “Either way, I don't think this is a simple crush. It's a nostalgic hyper-focus. A glimpse at something you thought was gone. She reminds you so much of Robert, and you miss the idea of him so much you are just... blitzing by any red flags. This is your chance to turn around, and back away. Or at the very least try to approach this with a calm, sober mind. Get to know Rebecca for Rebecca. Because this,” Caine gestures to the date set up, “whatever this is: it's not the Sugar Glass I know and have come to befriend. This looks like fresh-out-of-trauma, competitor Sugar Glass... You've grown a lot since that. Don't throw it away.”

Val sighs. “Ugh... the cards simply do not lie, do they. Alright, alright, I will be careful tonight. I'll try not to press too hard, and take it easy.”

“And the first step?”

“Christ, Knockout is basic in any timeline. Bugs-Bunny-d by a robot! Of course, of course. I'm assuming it didn't work out though, in the end.”

“Of course not, Wash fumbles the ball yet again. Base is still in full lock down. But turns out Knockout got Reverse Fate to pop in and pop out. The teleporter yoinking her before she could lift the lockdown. Meaning me and about 37 other goons were trapped in a bunker with a 'big bad mastermind' who couldn't get the computer to turn off her dramatic music.”

Rebecca laughs. “Going in my big book of 'fates worse than death.' I'm happy you're still sane.”

“My secret was... a little white fox managed to walk by with a red envelope,” Valery says with a grin. “And so Sugar Glass, petty crook, made her escape from an increasingly unhinged mad doctor before she went wacko and tried to brainwash me. She, like... needs a therapist. Maybe more than any other villain.”

There is a gentle knock on the glass. Pandora looks in with a raised eyebrow. Overdraw gives her a thumbs up, but Sugar Glass waves her in.

As Pandora pokes her head in, Sugar Glass formalizes the invitation. “Welcome Pandora. Nalagrom isn't with you, is he?”

“No... well... not *this* me. I am just here to extend an invitation given to me by Zeke to Overdraw as well. She has invited us to the Fox Den for a 'nightcap.' I did my best to explain that alcohol does not affect me, but she was already... I... believe the term is 'pre-gaming.' So... you are cordially invited.”

Rebecca looks to Val. “I... think I'm out of safe stories.”

“Go! Have fun! It was good to get to know the real you. Beneath all the pageantry and branding.”

“Yeah... the real me...” Overdraw sighs, before putting on her professional smile. “Alright. Just

a few drinks and I'll get a full night's sleep for tomorrow's round! Watch close. I'm gonna give everyone quite the show!"

Overdraw gets up and heads out. Pandora asks her, "You tell her everything?"

"Everything I can," Overdraw responds after a moment of hesitation, which gets a quizzical glance out of the machine. The unlikely duo walk off to get a drink.

Val cleans up the plates, puts the table cloth in the laundry bucket with her apron, and gets it started, washes out the cups after finishing the coffee, and sweeps. She carries it out with a ritualistic reverence. Her hands begin to shake as she wipes down tables and stops at the cursed place where her fortune was read. She grabs her woven necklace and rips it off, collapsing into the chair, sobbing.

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A special thanks to a few friends. The paralogues are great for a more relaxed pace but I still have so many character creators to cite, this could be a long one. Still I want to make sure wherever and however this is viewed they get their due recognition!

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Hooshey: Creator of Varila

Oki!: Creator of Banafsaj

Yashua: Creator of Rika and Niko

Cap the HUMBLE: Creator of Toffee

Woodensponge: Creator of Quinn

Undead: Creator of Lyla

ElectricEidolon: Creator of Cain

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