

Welcoming...

The White Quill

Featuring...

Kuzco

Calann

United Savage Abominations

Aureus Moonrise

Mister Saint

Dominique a

Cover by Askoga

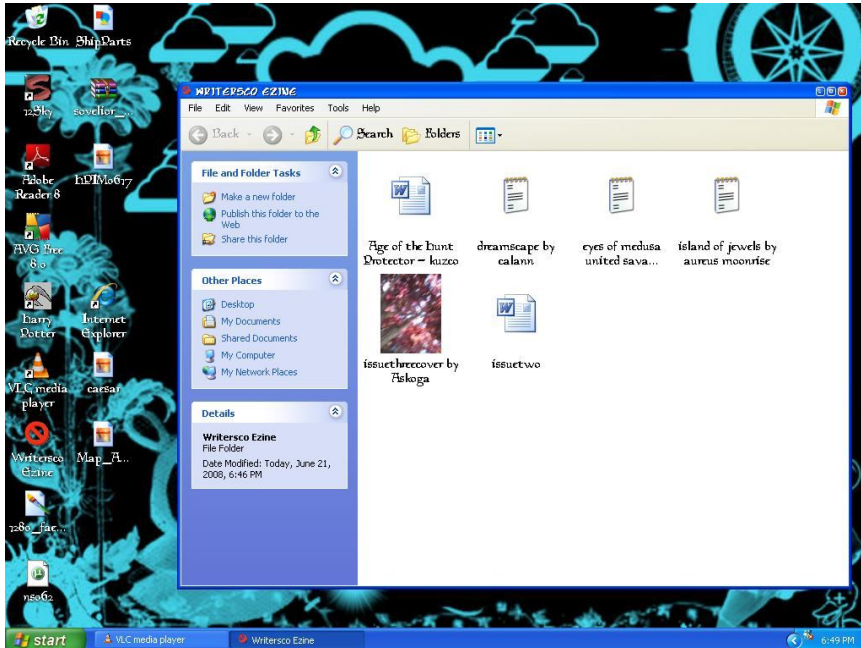
We've Spun Some Tales!



Moderator Notes...

So, I really couldn't come up with anything big to tell you all, so I decided to put up how I make our Ezine. This process is fairly simple, you could do it yourself, but I wouldn't encourage it because WC already has one.

Step One – I collect work from random people around the

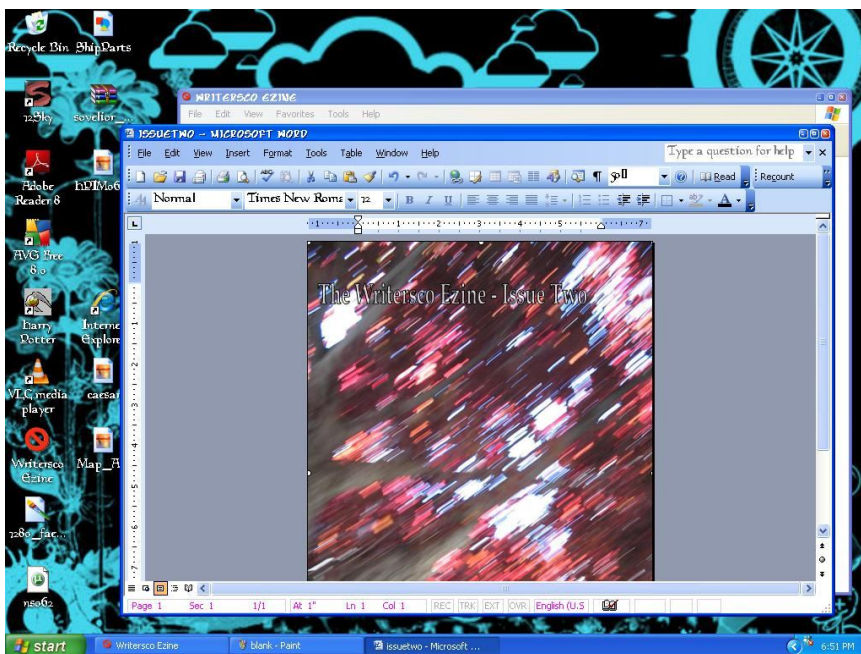


site, which is harder than it seems because you have to go through and read their writings to first see if it's appropriate, does it go with the theme, all this stuff. I usually read three or four things from every person and pick the best or the one I think will make people stop and stare.

Step Two- I assemble the Ezine in Microsoft Word. Yes, that's horribly advanced, I know.

Step Three- Click Print. My computer has a special program that I chose on the print screen to make it into a pdf format.

Well, that's the giant secret of the Ezine. –
Valient Tragedies



Dreamscape

By Calann

They were silent, always silent. Like shadows, they moved from one room to another, from patient to patient. Only once did I ever see them confer, even amidst themselves - and in that moment, I wasn't that sure about my security in that place anymore.

I had gone there after beginning to have increased problems in getting enough sleep and feeling tired to the bone practically all the time. The doctor confirmed my suspicions of insomnia and subsequent exhaustion, and he referred me to a sleep therapy clinic. He recommended it, saying the people working there were the best one could find.

Funny how I didn't realize the odd glint in his eyes until now when it seems already to be too late. Desperation, hatred, grief...? I don't know. Nevertheless, he was perfectly aware of where he was sending me.

I still haven't found out, and I doubt I ever will.

When I arrived to the clinic, a small suitcase in hand, having taken with me the necessary items for a few days' stay as instructed, I felt slightly apprehensive. What was this going to be like? The receptionist, however, gave me a charming, reassuring smile and convinced me there would be nothing to worry about. She then guided me to a corridor with the entrances to the bedrooms of the patients and showed me to my temporary accommodations. After that I tried to make myself comfortable despite the eerie aura of the place, stamped down on the part of me that wanted to go exploring, and waited.

Some hours later, in the early evening, I was fetched by someone who seemed to be a laboratory assistant. He led me down a flight of stairs, into a corridor which branched to several rooms on either side, glass windows allowing the people inside to see out and vice versa. The patient in the room nearest to me tried to shout something, but I couldn't hear her --- him? Never mind, the person's gender hardly matters. The assistant ushered me into one of those rooms and told me to wait. They - the sleep therapists - would soon come to take a look at me.

And so before I knew what was happening, I had been tied down and connected to all manner of machines by way of wires and tubes. The beeping and whirring was nearly overwhelming - I felt like someone mistakenly placed on a hospital operation table in the middle of surgery. I did all I could to stamp down on the panic raising its head inside me, and tried not to show it. After all, that would have been ridiculous, as this place was merely a clinic. Nothing more. Now I rather think that my initial gut feeling of being caged was a great deal closer to the truth. For all accounts, it was the truth - or became truth.

I don't know what they exactly did to me. The assistant called it treatment, so I thought it as such. I tried not to pay attention to the fact that the concept of time was becoming fuzzy and that I began to have peculiar dreams. Or so it was, until the day I saw - and heard - them talk. But by then, there was no escaping.

Apprehension rapidly dawning, I more sensed than saw them come towards me. Every muscle, every nerve in my body was screaming to get off that chair and run like never before. But instead, I stayed, somehow paralyzed by their gaze.

This time, prior to connecting me to the devices, they gave me some sort of injection. The needle was full of a light, shimmering blue liquid, but I fell asleep before my dread had time to grow.

Of the dreams I'd had up until then, this was the worst. It outrivaled every nightmare I had ever had in my entire life. And not just because of the events-- but because it felt so real. I was in a basement room of some kind, full of different gadgets and tools. Idly, I wandered around, picking things up and putting them down again. Finding some cloth, thread, and a needle, I decided to sew myself something. Calmly, I began to cut the cloth into pieces with the scissors I found lying on the floor nearby - and the next thing I knew, I was standing in front of a mirror, needle and thread in hand. I began to sew my mouth shut, slowly, painfully. Blood trickled between my fingers, and I was almost finished, when the thread suddenly ran out. Frustrated, I threw the needle away. There must be something else! - a stapler was lying forsaken in a dusty corner. I tested it on a finger, and upon a satisfying result, returned to the mirror and finished what I had started. I smiled at myself, but my eyes bore pure horror in their depths. I frowned upon discovering that I was crying. This would not do.

After groping around for a bit, I found two things that were essential in continuing my self-appointed torture. I raised the too-heavy sledgehammer high into the air and welcomed the pain when my kneecaps shattered with a sickening crunch. Had I the ability, I would have laughed. Being on the verge of going mad from the agony, I almost didn't feel the sensation of digging my eyes out with a dull spoon. Almost.

But only when I shoved my hands under a saw blade that had suddenly appeared beside me did I scream so hard I should have woken myself up. I awaited to waken any moment, lying in pathetically sobbing a heap on the cold floor.

What came was nothingness.

I think I've been sleeping ever since, constantly and acutely aware of my surroundings, yet unable to wake up. How long has it been...? I have no idea. I'm trapped in my odd dreams and in that state right between conscious and unconscious.

They're keeping me as prisoner in my own head, and the worst thing is that I don't even know why.

A banker is a fellow who lends you his umbrella when the sun is shining and wants it back the minute it begins to rain.

- Mark Twain

Oyster Theatre

By Dominique a

There was a theatre. Before you say anything, considering the people, the location, the methods and the pay, thank god there WAS a theatre. In any case, there was a theater. Askinfor Trou- Bell was a worker. Don't ask me what she was doing there or how she got there, as the best answer I can provide is bad fate, and even that only applies if you're a believer in fortune, but there was a theater and Askinfor was working in it. "It is a funny irony how my biggest dream is to be instead of the people I am forced to watch do what I want to do most"... So she would tell herself often. "Shut your mouth, Askinfor!" Don Co- Rely- on-eh yelled from across the hall. "Shut your mouth, we must begin now!" Askinfor heard the command and obeyed- Collar pulled up to her nose, zipper zipped shut, and there, she is ready to do her thing.

"The only way to get somewhere is by understanding you can't get ANYWHERE."

"Is your mouth shut properly?" A tall smoking boss looked down at her. "Hum hmm"- she answered- "Yes sir", she unzipped herself to reply and re- shut herself immediately.

Done Corelyone. A gigantic two person- person with one head where your head would normally be, another head where your OTHER head would in SOME cases be (Yes... that head) and two arms that could do nothing for either one of them heads, yet as you are soon to discover were particularly efficient at strangling their employees. If the many servants would leave them alone to feed themselves, brush their own hair and wipe their own noses, Don Corelyone wouldn't last a week. If any of the servants had ANY brains, they would do just that. The only brainful worker who wouldn't was Asky, because it is her literature duty to be there.

Still holding the broom in her hand she took a minute to enjoy the sights of the stage and all that was happening on it. The Ebony darkness around had little chance against that blue hallow that came pouring out like a dying star in the middle of a big nothing. By the color of the light she realized she was watching the "Armsters".

It seems unwise to me, almost against any artistic logic to allow someone to be standing with a broom in the same hall where a bunch of armless faggets in tuxedos are dancing. Think about it: There are only two lighted spots in this giant black nothing- One of them is this shinny gay fiasco and the other- the all mighty servant swiping dirt.

Furthermore, the dancers have been spending hours in front of the mirror messing with their somewhat over shampooed hair while the servant has not seen a shower in weeks, yet both seem to end up having the same haircuts... to die for.

Of course, this has all meant very little to Asky as her thoughts were still deeply in the process of...

In her mind she kept playing past conversations back and forth, back and forth. Vicious dreams of tormenting her in response to her total admiration, in the disguise of sweet words, corny promises and oh was she offended being thought to be SO stupid and SO blind.... So this is all a game... you just want to play... You know, play, to make our own lusts come true, to make our own life richer and better...

You do not play with people's feelings... it is NOT a game, or a rather destructive one it is, if so... It is not RIGHT, but it is OKAY...

Let us play, DEAR....

She had long ago had enough of a somewhat STRIKING attitude that she, maybe in the blindness of love or the desperation of desire had put up with. Tired of stripping herself to the bone the way she would do with NO ONE, only to run into a COLD, APATHETIC response, comments that are less than accepting and crumbs of warmth enough to keep her on her toes but just barely. EVERYBODY wants to feel LOVED. Not DESIRED. She had had plenty of that... EVERYBODY, as does she.

Too much for something is bad enough. Too much for nothing is unacceptable.

But of course, she will be weary and longing the next time he comes, if he comes, and these thoughts will crumble faster than this theatre is probably going to.

She's trapped. He has the advantage of knowing the buttons. She by now was under the impression he didn't even have any.

But she knew he did have them, yet she was too young, to inexperienced and far too desperate for him to push them even if she had known. Fine... have your way...

But see, she knew that even at these thoughts she was doing them both wrong, even though she WAS angry, very much so.

The main problem with asky was that even though her mouth was shut, SHE believed she knew too much.

In the bathroom is where she finally crashed. She CANNOT feel sorry for herself. She MUSN'T! It is against everything she's learned, and everything she believes in, and she probably has no reason to. But she does, and she is sitting there on the floor like the pitiful person she is. There, with the stench of urine and a few wet spots next to her, there she feels at home. But something of her refuses to accept it as right, the BEST part, the parts that he had seen and approved of, and she enjoyed it so much she can't even remember if she likes these parts herself or only because he likes them. But she's asking herself, and asking the RIGHT questions. Aren't you even a little bit disgusted with yourself? No one is appreciated right from the start, do you hear me? It echoes well here between four walls and a toilet, doesn't it? NO ONE, and by sitting here you are giving up. By being jealous of everybody around you, you are giving up. By being vicious to everyone he is friendly with you are giving up. By being vicious at all- you are giving up. And when you go to bed at night you're restless and desperate, and you know why? and if it was someone else talking to her instead of her own self, the someone would place their finger under her chin and lift her head up- Because it is not LIKE you to give up. Someone else, yes, maybe anyone else... But not YOU.

So if you have to cry do it now, do it by a note, because in 5 minutes somebody out there is going to need you to swipe the floor or something. And there between the urine drops she had let go and cried and not out of viciousness, or for someone else to see, or for anyone else to judge or for anyone else at all, but for herself. She's scared.

She's tired, and she wanted to get a grip. And she's okay, for now. The bathroom door slammed behind her.

The only way you can get somewhere is by accepting that you can't stay where you are forever.

Gabriel

By Mister Saint

How oft I've dreamt of a world gone by,
of a time of a place where visions fly,
Of the land of a home in a time, no more,
Where the av'rice of man could not harm me.

Today I stand on a pre-ci-pice tall,
my eyes observe mankind's downfall,
The exodus that I have set to come
For the sin of the lie and the lie of the sin.

Sing a song of death with me
The symphony tuned, the melody sweet,
See the plague that unfolds below
And buries the streets with the dead

In days long past I did believe
of a world, just, beyond reprieve,
my eyes were sealed by an innocent's glaze,
and the truth of the land did not sting me

They pushed my heart to its last extent
Gave me pain, and grief, and a-go-ny,
To seek the truth that my Father held
While on earth a cage of flesh bound me

Sing a song of death with me
The solo to end all the life, beneath,
To my lips, the trumpet of endtimes goes
And the world, is torn, asun-der.

Island of Jewels

By Aureus Moonrise

Ally ran through the forest, chasing Sarah, her best friend, in a fun, all-afternoon game of tag. She jumped down a dirt hill, over a log, under an overhanging tree, and jumped a creek. Coming up on the wire fence around their property, her friend slowed trying to think of where to go next. Ally closed in on her.

“You’re mine now!”

Sarah screamed and laughed, running away again. Even with the close call, Ally still hadn’t caught up to her friend. Sarah ran harder, widening the distance little by little. She jumped a boulder and ran past the creek again. Her best friend bolted right after.

The two girls greatly enjoyed their games of tag. It was one of their most valued games. They were able to run free in their gracious backyard. They liked to make believe that they were princesses, taking their mares for a good trot on summer afternoons, after festival. They liked to believe that they could summon all the fairies to their side, asking them for guidance on political issues or which prince each of them would marry. They liked to believe they could dance under the sun or in the moonlight to please their gods that worshipped their young beauty. They both knew that they were all games. Still, it felt lovely to them to dream.

Ally chased Sarah down a slope where no trees had grown into the field yet. This was the open field they often held horse competitions at. The crowds cheering each princess on filled the silence around them.

Birds took flight as Ally cried, “Tag! Tag! You’re it, you’re it!”

She screamed again, escaping Sarah who was now ‘it’ and intended on getting her back.

The girls ran down a second slope in the field, a slope that neither of the girls had noticed wasn’t there before.

At the bottom was a large, raised, round stone. It was covered with markings. The girls didn’t notice, believing they had willed it to be there with their imagination. Ally jumped onto it, running back and forth on the far side, waiting for Sarah to catch up. Sarah crawled up its height, then looked at Ally to find which way to dart. She lunged and caught her wrist, ally grabbed hers and swung her around, much like a dance. They laughed and spun on the stone, then collapsed down, breathless. Ally looked down at the stone realizing that it wasn’t disappearing. Sarah looked down too, but neither of them had time to speak. It started to glow a bright blue, shooting light and sparkling orbs upwards to them. Sarah, the younger of the two, grabbed ally, who protectively held her tight. The trees, the grass, and the sky all faded away.

Ally blinked. They were still in the forest, they were still on the stone, and most importantly, Sarah was still with her. She stroked her back, signaling it was safe to look. Ally looked around, deciding whether or not to believe she had fallen asleep or if this was really good game.

“Are we still in our own kingdom?”

“No...”

Ally looked at her. Sarah was standing up and looking intently at the forest surrounding them. "This forest is mostly pine. It's so much thicker than ours. Look, there are cypresses and Christmas trees all around. Ours had deciduous trees and a few conifers. They'd set our kingdom alight in the fall and shower us with their blossoms in the spring. This forest has so few changing trees."

Ally looked at her with admiration. She was right. Looking around them, she noticed the trees also had richer color and the sky was a darker, deeper blue, like looking at photographs of the Earth. All the colors, in fact, even the dirt looked better in color.

She had just stood to join her sister when she heard soft, quick thuds behind her. She turned and jumped back, gripping both of Sarah's hands.

The thuds were coming from hooves, but they weren't horse hooves. Two male centaurs walked peacefully towards them.

Sarah muffled a sharp gasp, sinking her back into her sister's. They didn't look like they wanted to hurt them, but their bare muscles and hooved legs seemed threatening enough.

The brown-black haired one with a brown fur covered body seemed to be the leader. The blonde-haired, white-bodied centaur walked a step behind him. They both had flowing back-length hair, like men did in ancient Greek myths.

The girls stood frozen as they approached and stopped in front of them. They dropped their torsos and bowed. The dark-haired one righted himself and addressed them.

"Greetings, princesses. We are happy that you arrived safely."

Ally and Sarah were completely mind-blown. What in the world happened? Sarah whispered to her, "Why are they calling us princesses? We're not princesses."

The centaurs continued since the two girls remained silent. "The Oracle told us you would finally arrive today. But we don't know what you're to be called. What are your names?"

Ally answered slowly, hoping the names would clear the mistake. "I'm Ally."

"And I'm Sarah," she turned around and faced them.

Instead of them taking back their presumption of them being royalty, they simply nodded. The fair-haired one commented that they were unusual, but pretty names.

"My name is Karos, leader of the centaur army." He turned against the stone. "One of you ride on me, and the other on him."

Ally very hesitantly and carefully slipped herself over his bare back. She looked around, trying to find a place to hold onto.

"Grasp around my waist if you need to."

The white centaur looked over at Sarah and stretched out his hand. "My name is Minos, your highness. I am honored that you ride me."

Sarah, who was extremely shy of the beast, slowly took his hand and he guided her safely to his back. Too shy, she didn't hold on as he gently broke into a trot.

Ally scooted up on Karos's back. "May I ask you something?"

"Yes, of course, Princess Ally," came his matured voice.

"Sarah is my sister, but we're not at all related by blood. I'm twelve and she's eleven and a half. We've never even heard of this place. How can we be the princesses of it?"

“Hmm. Twelve and eleven. A year younger and a year older than we had guessed,” Karos mused. “But even so, you two are our princesses no matter what age you are. As for the rest, blood does not stop family from being family, and as to your royalty, you will learn.”

“Mr. Minos?” Sarah asked quietly.

“Minos is fine, Princess. What is it?” His voice was light and younger than Karos’s.

“What’s the name of this Kingdom?”

The Centaurs looked at each other feeling a tiny strand of nervousness. “Skylyis.”

She smiled. “That’s very pretty.”

Minos smiled back. “As pretty as our princesses.”

Eyes of Medusa

By United Savage Abominations

His head held high staring at the stars burning in the night sky,
She knew he was thinking about her but he would always lie,
She had always wondered if it was her or his insecurities keeping them apart,
She wanted him, lusted after him to make him her own,
He walked to her and looked her and looked her in the eye,
His face became terror stricken as his legs turned to stone,
Snakes erupted from her head and shedding crystal tears she began to cry,
He held a hand to her face, "Be as it may,
One thing is in fact true,
Before I turn I must say,
I have always loved you."
She replies, "It seems da tide of fate tears us away,
I never wanted to lose ya,
But, sometimes tings must be set aray,
especially when you stare into da eyes of Medusa."

The man who smiles when things go wrong has
thought of someone to blame it on.

- Robert Bloch

Age of the Hunt Protector

By Kuzco

The year is 2561 and due to very awkward political and sociological reasons that have something to do with a cold war and a sky-dive in the world's economics, things are extremely different.

This is a time when the human race traced back to its origins, to the time when it regained the pleasure and joy of a hunter. This was a society where you could hunt anything; what you killed, you could keep. No endangered species and no sacred grounds to preserve, just the thrill of the hunt. You could even hunt humans BUT, that was far from easy for you see...a boy would be able to tell smells even before he could talk, he would learn to run rather than walk, he would know how to defend himself from a bear before he reached 8 years old and would hunt alone for the first time at 10 years of age. A time when every man and woman was strong, fast, and agile and with keen senses of awareness because everyone else had been killed during the well known natural selection by the name of "Survival of the Fittest" which had been at work for centuries now. Thus the greatest prey in the world was, in fact, man.

A line of Kings, the greatest hunters of all, ruled this free Darwinian driven world with justice and might worthy of their position. But from all of the kings, none other ever had the people's appreciation like King Jileo the Honourable. Like all kings before him, he kept all weapons banned for the exception of blades and blunt; he also travelled the world hunting animals.

As you can imagine, most species had gone extinct. But hunger was no longer a problem; the hunting business sorted itself out and there were breeding farms all over the globe with more than enough food for all of Jileo's people.

Tigers, foxes, lions, cheetahs, bears, wolves and a lot of other strong and proud creatures like the hawk, the falcon, the eagle, the shark, the whale, the dolphin can only be found in books. This is an age where civilized man has gained the taste for the chase and the challenge of a kill, where the exceptionally physically perfect human being in your mind has become the average 17 year old. This is the AGE OF THE HUNT and it was during Jileo's time that it would come to an end. But that is another tale; the tale that is told here is but a legend proven true.

"Have you heard? Have you heard about the protector?" An athletic seasoned man asked. He was dressed in a T-Shirt and trousers, with knife holsters at his torso. He was the bar keep at this bar. The woman he had asked too wore a red cloak with a hood, she promptly replied:

"No, I've been in the wild for months now."

"Ahhh, then listen and behold: It is rumoured and told that there is one man that is not a hunter."

"Preposterous."

"Fraid not. That man travels across Jileo's immense territory accompanied by preys, he protects them from hunters."

"You mean he uses them as bait to hun-"

“No.” The man interrupted her, aggravated. “He has forsaken the age we live in. Some of those who attack his protégés are just defeated, not killed.”

“What?!”

“The amazing thing is that word of his death hasn’t circled yet. Not a hunter has yet to claim his name and always do the hunters show up defeated or dead.”

“You are tricking this huntress, are you not?”

“No...” A man at her side said. He was rather small and looked frail, like he hadn’t fought in years. He was missing a hand too.

“I saw him. I hunted him years ago. I trapped and killed one of his animals...a rabbit. I fought him but he was too skilled...he cut off my hand and--”

Her cloak fluttered as she tried to cut the man’s throat but he leaned backwards and pushed with his wrist so to fall from the counter and unto the ground; he rolled and leapt towards the exit but a dagger was soon to plunge through his back. He crashed against the door, breaking it, falling outside and rolling over, dead. She stood still, sat, her arm stretched out due to the throw.

“Why hadn’t anyone claimed that kill yet?”

“What would be the fun in accomplishing such an easy task?” the bartender replied, while he cleaned a glass, smiling.

“Things have certainly changed while I was out.” the woman commented, already on her way out. “Human is the ultimate prey: the kill count is all that matters.” She grabbed the knife. “Yes, one enjoys a challenge, and thus the strong, but hunters prey on the weak too, ‘Tis the way of life and how Men became the strongest of opponents.” She whipped the dagger at the air, getting the blood off; then she plucked one hair from his head and placed it somewhere inside her cloak.

“An idealist, are we?” the bartender questioned with a smirk.

“Aren’t we all?” she asked, angry.

“Hahahahaahha. He was alive because he has a big brother. And his big brother has a kill count greater than all of us put together.” He smiled. “I’m curious to see what happens next.”

The woman, under the cover of her hood, bit her lip.

“I cower before nothing! What happens next is—”

“What happens next is I crush your brains all over the floor!” A voice came from her side.

She heard a blade cutting the wind and thus jumped back and looked at her foe, grabbing two short-blades, upside down.

What she saw was a 2 meter tall muscular red-head and brown eyes grabbing hold to the biggest sword she had ever seen. He was wearing torso and leg armour, with a red cape and steel gauntlets on his forearms. The Zanbattou was already coming in for another horizontal attack.

Unable to defend, she jumped back again but he leapt towards her, waving his sword from side up and bringing it down on her.

He was much more agile than her for her mind was frantically hoping she’d touch the ground before the sword reached her. She drew her knives higher to defend but then felt the ground below her feet. She immediately hopped and spun, to her left; witnessing the blade almost cut her nose and chest.

The motion had uncovered the hood; she had short brown hair and black eyes, Caucasian complexion. The Zambattou smashed open a small crater on the floor; the man was already swinging again; she jumped back, turned away, and ran for her life.

“COME BACK HERE, YOU BITCH!!” Big Brother gave chase.

“Hahahhhahaha, so often does the hunter become the hunted. Shall we witness how this ends, boys?” He asked the whole bar, a question to all grunts that smiled, smirked and grinned at him, getting up.

Luckily the giant sword slowed him down a notch, to her speed.

She took turns, used empty buildings and miraculous jumps atop rooftops but nothing worked.

Ironically, she saw a couple also fleeing from a group of hunters; the female was pregnant.

In these days of Age, pregnant women made for great preys. Slow and unwilling to damage their offspring with too much movement, they normally hid or had their man protect them: the strong survive.

She was strong but her pursuer was stronger and apparently a good chaser; she ran into the huge forest, from where she had arrived, in an attempt to lose him there.

They ran for hours, both controlling their breathing as they ran lower on stamina; in the end, hers were the limbs that collapsed first from exhaustion.

She tripped and rolled violently, crashing against a tree. In desperation, she threw four knives which he slapped away with his free hand before leaping into the air, bringing his behemoth of a sword with him.

Surprisingly though, he suddenly turned it and stuck it in the ground to halt his movement; three arrows pierced the space in front of him.

He landed and promptly stated, looking at her,

“Your traps won’t work!” He waved his sword around, literally throwing it away.

The sword ravished a tree whilst the man in it hopped, landing at its side.

He was black skinned with black hair and brown eyes, athletic with muscular limbs; he wielded a small crossbow in each hand, a shield at his back, a sword at his left hilt.

“That was foolish.” He aimed his crossbows and shot.

The unarmed man, with blurring speed, blocked all arrows simply by motioning his arms so that they’d hit his gauntlets.

“Ha!” he reacted. The woman looked on, confused, for this was no trap of hers; she intended to flee as soon as she could.

Her rescuer had let go of his crossbows, drawing upon his sword and shield.

“I will offer this one chance. Go.”

“What? You’re not with her? HA! Interesting, what’s your reason for this?”

He aimed his sword as a last warning.

“Fine, I’ll find out before killing you.” He pounded his fists, enthusiastically.

“What’s your name?”

“Otai Kyumbo.”

“I’m Vaarshi Pikto.”

“The War Monger?”

“Heh, bring it!”

Otai started with a sword thrust, deflected by Vaarshi's forearm; he brought the sword back and slashed at his left shoulder but Vaarshi turned and leaned, then spinning to deliver a violent left punch at Otai's shield; it threw him off balance, the sheer force of the blow. Vaarshi grabbed his shield and pulled hard on it, throwing Otai to the ground.

"Steady there, ha ha." He mocked.

Otai rolled and turned to face him; he put the shield in front of him to cover the sight of the sword.

"Humpf, all tricks I see." Vaarshi commented, jumping to see the sword and strike at Otai who was, alas, too skilled for that; he lifted his shield, keeping the sword from being seen. Unable to see the attack, Vaarshi could do nothing but fail at deflecting it once it came, in a split second, from the cover of the shield.

Impaled by the sword, on his chest, he looked at his foe in shock; behind him, hidden in the bushes, he noticed four extinct species, animals that should be dead.

He laughed, in coughs, choosing his last words.

"Well done, Protector. But you'll be sorry."

"So long as they live."

"Ha!" And Vaarshi was dead.

"What?!" The woman reacted,. "You're..." At the moment, all of Otai's protégés came forth and surrounded him: A bengal tiger, a wood duck, a saker falcon, a grey wolf, an armless Asiatic black bear, a red fox and a Red-throated Bee-eater.

Awestruck, she slowly moved her hand insidier he cloak, to grab her short sword.

"Are you well? Or wounded?"

"Nothing relevant." She stated, standing up, covering her head with her hood.

"Fortunate. Scarce are those with such luck. Are you, too, a hunter?"

"Who isn't?" She replied.

They both were keeping their distance. Otai's eyes seemed full with hope and kindness, very opposite to the watchful stare of his animal followers.

"I." Otai answered. "I have also stumbled into the acquaintance of a family of farmers, a group of miners and a travelling bard blessed with wits and speed beyond any I have ever given witness to. All of them do not hunt."

"Well, I guess you got me there..." She had to admit.

Awkward silence then prolonged for a few minutes, before Otai bid farewell.

"Very well. Good fortune in your ventures."

"Wait...hm..." She was hesitating, but this was the opportunity of a life time, she had to do it so she inhaled her fear and requested:

"Let me join you, your group."

As expected, the prospect of a human companion seemed to touch the famed Protector, leading to a sudden but very short lived glare.

"Trust is a most valued currency, in these days of age. Difficult to gain, complicated to give. Do you know how a duck comes to trust a bear?"

"No."

"Because I killed the last bear that attacked, because I kill any of our group who strikes within."

"Yeah." She understood the warning. "You do well."

"We are heading south. Move ahead of us, for now."

“Ok.” She agreed, turning her back at all the preys and protector, she lead the way without unhanding the two short swords she was grasping behind the cover of her cloak.

They walked, silent, for over two days until they finally stopped to eat; he shared his provisions with her and the animals ate Vaarshi, the carnivores, and grass and fruit, the rest.

During the meal, Otai was asked.

“Otai, why do you protect them?”

“They can’t protect themselves.” He stated.

“Well, not from the strongest of hunters...but then again, neither could Vaarshi. Why did you kill him?”

“He was too apt. If I exercised restraint, I would have died; you would have died; my protégés would have died. I killed him for he was strong.”

“Weaker than you.”

“Without his weapon, yes, but that was his foolishness. I grow tired, let us rest and continue tomorrow.”

“Where are we headed?”

“To the closest place I have not yet seen.”

“Hum...where’s that?”

“Due south.”

She sighed, giving up trying to get an answer from him. It was frustrating the way the way he talked, the certainty in his opinion.

That night, she slept more soundly than ever, realizing that the protector’s greatest gift was one of security, one of restful sleep.

They travelled together for a few more days in awkward silence, gradually getting comfortable around each other. They started communicating lightly around the 7th day.

“Pass the water, please.”

“Hm? Oh, sure, here.”

They talked again when he asked her how many fish he should catch, and again when he thought they were being tracked.

On the 31st day, Otai caught a very large number of fish and held a banquet to celebrate a new found friendship.

“What’s the occasion?” She asked, seeing Otai cooking a few of the fish in the usual pot.

“We are friends.” He smiled. “Or at the very least, I consider us so. Please, tell me your name.”

She looked at him and gasped, dumbfounded; all this time and she had not introduced herself. Blushing from the shadowy cover of her hood and slightly bowing her head in shame, she said:

“Kyla Banus”

“You have not taken advantage of two openings, as well as demonstrating a peaceful personality throughout this past month. I trust you, as you do me.”

She uncovered her head, smiling gladly.

“That’s great.”

Silence, though, settled again. Feeling responsible, Otai broke it:

“You once asked me why I am a protector. I can freely reply now. I believe, strongly, that killing a living being for the sole reason that it is weaker, is neither right nor an achievement to be proud of. I am vehemently against it and that is why I fight.

Yes, Vaarshi was the weaker man, having relinquished his weapon; that fact enabled me to vanquish him, it was not the reason for me to do so. I did it because he sought to harm creatures for none decent reasons.”

“Hm...I can understand that. The question is: why do you think like that? Why do you believe in that?”

“Ah...yes, that **is** the question,” he jested, smiling. “I am, alas, unable to elaborate an honest and wise response.

For whatever reason, principles and a way of life form grow on our personality, and we have not a choice but to abide by them; It is just who we are, who we become.”

“I...see.” she replied, thoughtful.

“But tell me, Kayla, what is your story?”

“Hmm...oh! Uhhhh...the usual. Born, raise to hunt, hunted.” She shrugged. “Nothing special.” she admitted, embarrassed.

They talked for the remainder of the night, eating plenty of fish. The animals had their usual meals, enjoyed peace and quiet and the good mood that surrounded them.

He told her he was travelling around the world, doing his best to gather as many protégés as possible. It was his life mission to provide security and that impressed her greatly.

She started helping him fish, the animals also trusted her more; she became very helpful, providing new traps that were easy to set up and dismantle. She also knew how to cook greens and fruits beyond the art of soaking them in boiling water.

Otai grew very fond of Kyla, as the days passed.

On a particular day, he was teaching her to fish with her hand; it isn't as easy as piercing them with a dagger. She had been trying for four days now; Otai was at the margin, giving directions, while she fished on a low river side with water by the waist; even there, she wore her cloak and hood.

They were rarely, nowadays, not smiling or laughing.

“Ick! They keep surprising me!”

“Hahaha. Just relax. Sense and grasp.”

She focused on the water and the fish that in it swam; she sensed a stir, she saw and she thrust her hand to grab the fish. This time, it did not slip.

“I caught one!” she yelled, happy and letting go of it, since they weren't in need of food right now.

She initiated a run at Otai, arms open in accomplishment.

“Well done.” Otai congratulated, watching as she approached. Surprisingly, she leapt for a hug. With a jumping heart, he opened his arms to accordingly hug her back. They hugged and shared a very happy moment...ruined by an acute pain on Otai's back.

He flinched for a second, making sure he wasn't imagining it; due to the emotion of the moment, he had failed to notice the attack.

Immediately, he pushed Kayla slightly, so not to hurt her, and spun around to face the enemy; alas he didn't even have time to examine what surrounded them because another blade sank on his side.

It was then he realized what was going on. He turned around to face his love and found a head bowed, covered by the hood which looked at the hands that just shoved two more daggers on his torso.

Kayla refused to look at Otai who, in a grunt of pain, pulled away.

Holding down the tears of betrayal, he pulled out the knife on his back and let himself fall. He coughed blood, the grass under him turning humid, soaking red as he tried to glimpse the face of the emotionless huntress, finding only void in the red hood that now covered the straightened head.

“I...” He coughed.

“You’re an idiot!” she yelled, mad. “I hunt! What’s so hard to understand, Protector??!” She drew her two short-swords and kneeled, placing them in a scissors position at his neck. Already with a blurred vision, he felt a tear drop on his cheek. He remembered Vaarshi’s words:

“You’ll be sorry.” That is what the war monger said. He said it because he already knew what I would do.

He looked at her with empty bloodshot eyes, he grinned as he tried to move but no can do. His lung was pierced, his stomach and kidney were pierced. He would be dead in a matter of seconds.

“You are the ultimate prey...” Kayla said, with a shaken though determined voice. Obviously she considered this a test on her. She was a hunter, and she was about to put emotion aside and do what she does. And she was going to pass that test and become one of the greatest hunters that ever lived.

But Otai? He was worried. He heard the faint noise of his animal companions, growling and quacking and screeching and barking and howling rage and sadness at this betrayal. She had placed the swords there to keep them at bay, while she thought of a plan to kill them all.

We cannot help but to abide by the principles that are the foundation of our way of life. Vaarshi knew this, thus he laughed because he knew I was emotionally weak. He knew what kind of hunter could get me as her prize. My...I have failed them all. My stupidity, my loneliness. GET UP, OTAI!

His left hand grasped his sword but she tightened the swords, saying with a shaken voice:

“I’m sorry Otai. I respect you for sticking to your ideals and hope you understand as I stick to mine.” She gripped harder and clenched her teeth, letting loose more tears.

They...no...

At that moment, something stirred the trees; leafs tore off and the animals shivered as a figure practically flew from the tree line to their position, kicking Kayla in the face. The man had kicked her up, thus she didn’t cut Otai. He landed and bowed down as quickly as he could, telling Otai’s ears:

“I am King Jileo. I vow that none of your protégés will die!” he said, surely. “Rest in peace, Protector.”

What? The greatest hunter in the world? What’s he doing here? What...he’s not a liar, not him. My animals...

“Trust me. I have found the beauty and necessity in nature. I will see it restored.”

Otai smiled, truly happy. None could fight like the king and if he vowed to keep them safe...Otai’s last words were an attempt at “thank you.” He died halfway through it.

Kyla stood up and looked at the attacker, massaging her face; that blow had hurt harder than anything she could remember. And his assault was too fast, just as she had noticed his presence, she was already receiving the blow; she only had time to place her shoulder against her jaw, so it wouldn't break.

Spitting blood, she looked as he covered Otai's eyes.

"What hunter cries for a prey?" the man asked.

He stood up, and by gods he was intimidating. To the point the animals were still quiet, looking on with hesitation.

"Well well well..." A familiar voice came, from the other end of the river. It was the bartender Kyla had met, joined by about 35 men behind him. They had just come out of cover.

"Ain't this a startling development? One month, one month she waited. She had openings but she knew she couldn't take them. She waited until she was sure she could take her prey, her prize..." He grinned. "AND SO DID WE!!" He drew upon two tomahawks; his grunts all did the same to various different weapons, mostly swords.

"We'll claim the Protector's prize! As we claimed the invincible War Monger Vaarshi's! We'll claim your head and the king's head!"

"What?!" Kyla reacted, glancing at Jileo who slowly drew upon two long swords, from his back, one at each hand.

"By royal decree, I order you to yield. Under my reign will the Age of the Hunt be no more!" he said, unflustered by the many man that had swore to kill him.

"What?" Kyla reacted again, confused. She looked back at the band who had just leapt over the small river, landing on their side.

"Yeah right! You're going down Jileo, soon it'll be OUR reign!"

Kayla's head span into gear, Jileo's muscles contracted, the men charged.

They say this was a tragic tale, they say that the king slaughtered the band of hunters, they say Kyla is the same as Kyla Banus, huntress queen who defied Jileo's new world order, that the bartender survived and later led a team that collected Jileo's head; they say many things, tell many tales but this is neither of them: this is the tale of Otai Kyumbo, who lived so fervently for the well-being of others that even upon suffering the greatest of tragedies, even in death, he smiled and gave thanks to the one who assured the well-being of others. A tale Kings have demanded that schools teach to younglings ever since.

This was the tale of The Protector.

Kuzco is a Portuguese writer who's only been writing in English since he was 14. "I started writing so people can read my stories. And I kept writing because there's always been at least (and mostly, to be honest) one person reading and enjoying it. I believe I've been improving all this time and that I'll keep improving...with practice, determination and the never ceasing imagination :)." Kuzco writes mostly in the bus, writing only a page or two.

Whew... that was a big issue, but wasn't it nice. As you've probably noticed, this is size 26 font, I'm using to get the attention of people so I can announce this!

White Quill Logo Contest!

I was going through and noticed, hey we don't have one and I'm not taking the White Quill's (it's some company...*grumbles*). So, design one and send it in to us!

See you next episode!