

The
Glitching
Outcome

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THE FLARAWAY

Cabunoc, Kristian Gage
Rugas, Sebastian
Pobre, Jason
[REDACTED]

Book 1

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- 2022 The Flaraway -

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For all aspiring authors

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INTRODUCTION

Fifteen years ago in Arena Tower somewhere in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the father, Kai came to the arena while getting fought by a goon. He saw over the distance, a boss.

“Well, well, well, how did my minion do?” The boss says.

“Good, but kinda wimpy,” Kai replied.

They started landing punches and kicks everywhere but to no use it did not affect the boss. The boss shakes and Kai is confused why he is doing that. Then, out of nowhere, he lunges at Kai; the father tries to keep his ground but to no avail he was killed. He brought him into his body storage room, laid dead, hidden away, for no one to see again.

Now, 15 years later, his son Brody is on the hunt to find him.

LIGHTS OUT

Brody searches for his father, he looks very similar to him. He looks all around Arena Tower, and there is only one place left for him to look. He goes there and fights the goons and makes it up. Tripping into the room, the boss, still standing, stares at him, ready to fight.

“You look a lot like your father,” the boss’s stern, harsh voice exclaims.

“SHUT UP. I KNOW YOU HAVE MY DAD, LET HIM GO!!” Brody says. They start fighting, slamming each other on the walls when the lights start to flicker.

“I *killed* your father, Brody,” the boss claims. “And now I’m going to kill *you*.” Nevertheless, they keep on hitting each other. “He’s gone, son. Fifteen years ago. Do you really think you can win this?”

“You’re about as weak as your mustache,” Brody challenges.

“Quit this smack talk, and start fighting like a MAN.” the boss interjects. “You’re like your father. Weak. Unable. Cocky. Can’t do anything.”

In the midst of the fighting, Brody realizes something.

How is he still standing from all these fights? The boss is immortal, he is something else. However, he noticed something on the bench next to him. *Improbability Destroyer*. The weird device reads.

“Fine.”

“NO. Give me that, that *thing*, It is too powerful in your hands.” Brody tries to use it against him but it is no use. It is a dud. The boss dashes toward Brody, tackling him into the floor. The boss walks backwards, looking down at Brody’s sore body.

“Come on, I know you’re in there. FIGHT! GET UP. NOW!”

Brody gets back up and notices something on the shelf next to him. *Ava Auditor*. It is a book. He picks it up and tries to use it as a weapon.

“HEY! That’s my grandmother’s book!” the boss exclaims. He runs towards him and attacks him again. “You’ll end up with the same fate as your father. He tried to kill me, but he *lost*.” The boss shoves him into the ground. “And so will you.”

“I’m immortal. You can’t kill me. Never. None in a billion years, you can’t.” the boss reiterates again.

Brody doesn’t hear any of that. He sweeps his leg, tripping him into the ground. The lights flicker rapidly. Brody gets down on his level, and both of them fight horizontally, both laid on the ground. The boss gets the upper ground, and Brody cries out in struggle. Over the grunting, you can hear the faint

singing from the karaoke bar from downstairs. Below them was Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, just at the edge of the city.

Brody gets back on his feet. He relocates the book, and slams him onto the ground again. “Your mustache has turned green.”

“It’s a sign that I’m immortal. You can’t compete.” Brody steps to the doorframe, trying to catch a breath. He finds a few coins on the desk. The boss takes the trash back out, and these are their new weapons. The lights flicker once more.

Brody tackles the boss, and something falls out of his pocket. It is the *Improbability Destroyer*.

“Destroying it will only release my *true power*, I’m warning you.”

Brody has the temptation to destroy it. Not now, though. In an alternative move, he finds a hair brush and tries to stab him with it. It misses. The boss uses this vantage point and knocks him again on the ground once more. Brody observes the *Destroyer* in his hands, and takes it from him. He tries to use it, but it doesn’t work. It’s another dud! But as he topples over he finds that something falls out of his other pocket. It’s the real *Destroyer*. Both tired, he destroys it in a last ditch effort to kill him. The instability shakes the ground, making both of them topple over. As he stands up, he looks down at the boss, now broken and weak. The boss’s breathing slows, and slows, until it stops. The son did it, the boss is dead.

Later, he goes back to the arena and still finds him lying

on the ground. He appears like he is glitching, as if he is in a seizure, but as he stands up, Brody notices that it was not the boss, he is a monster, a demon. The son books it, and runs straight to the door. Unfortunately for him, though, the door was tightly shut.

The son struggles to open the door as the monster approaches him. He finally got the door open and slammed the door on the monster. The monster got out of the room and hunted for the son. He was hiding under a table. The monster went downstairs to see where he went. While this was happening, the son tip-toes and follows him down the steps. Unexpectedly, the son backstabs the monster for time and dashes upstairs. He found a remote that looked special and used it against the monster and it ran away. Then the remote was out of batteries. As he wanders off, however, he sees a light but he never minded it. He takes the bag next to him instead.

As the son takes the bag the monster chases the son. They end up having a brutal chase. As they are fighting, the ground starts shaking. Oddly enough, the shaking only happens for a few seconds. He finds a clipboard on the desk nearest to him, and without hesitation smacks him with the board. The monster stumbles away, but in that moment notices the light on the ground, again. He picks it up, thinking it was a phone. As he wanders away once more, out of nowhere, he gets shocked by the phone, pretty hard. Knocked to the ground, he takes no concern, and gets back up and walks away. Then, it shocked him,

again. He goes on his knees, failing to take another breath. In a few seconds, he lays there, now lifeless. The monster picks him up, and drags him to where his father is, the Body Storage Room.

Somewhere in Ohio his cousin Adam wants to spend a little time with Brody.



FULL STORM

Adam takes the six hour drive to the edge of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where Arena Tower stood tall. The cousin goes to Brody's house and notices nobody was there except his wife, Mary. He knocks on the door and Mary opens.

"Brody, is that you?"

"No, but that's who I'm looking for. Do you know where he is?" Adam asks. She invites him inside and offers him a seat.

"I haven't seen him in weeks." Mary claims.

"Where was the last place you saw him?" Adam replies.

"The park," Mary replies. "That's what he told me before he left."

Adam, now with new-found information, starts heading to the park. He sees footprints leading to the Arena Tower. As he heads in the tower he sees a person sitting on a bench. Adam asks "Have you seen my cousin?"

"What does he look like?" The person inquires, seeking to assist him.

"Like this?" Adam shows a picture of Brody.

"I think so. Last time I saw him he was upstairs," he replies.

Adam goes upstairs and finds his cousin. “BRODY!” Adam exclaims.

“ADAM!” Brody says. “Come o’er here, give me a hug.”

Adam comes to give Brody a hug but then Brody kicks Adam. ‘Ow, what are you doing Brody?’ Adam says.

“My name is not Brody,” the now-unknown man counters.

“Then who are you?” Adam asks.

“Your cousin calls me ‘monster’ but my name is really Auditor,” Auditor explains. “He came here and challenged me three weeks ago, to no avail. He’s dead, Adam. Dead.”

Adam stood there in shock. Only three weeks ago he was full of life, with his wife. But now he is dead. Gone. Never to be seen by his wife. His friends. His cousin.

“But now you know.”

The Auditor fiercely swings and attacks Adam, dashing toward his body. Adam winced in fear and ran out of the tower. He finds a strange light, a light that the Auditor cursed. It seems that the curse has gone away. Adam approaches it, and tries to touch it but it seems there is a force field.

Maybe there is some way to break it.

Adam goes back to Mary's house and breaks the news to her. “Your husband... he’s gone.”

“GONE?! As in, dead?”

“Yep. He’s dead, over there in Arena Tower. You can’t

even see him, a man named Auditor is keeping it locked down.”

“Are— are you sure? He’s probably just faking it or something. He has to still be alive!”

“Nah, I’m sorry, Mary. He was electrocuted alive. That thing, it looked like a weird device. The Auditor cursed it. He can’t still be alive. I’m so sorry to break it to you.”

Mary wipes the tears off her face and gives off a sigh. She is flabbergasted, Brody is dead, DEAD. And nobody knows about it except Mary and Adam. Should she tell someone? Should she do something about it? She has to do something about it.

She walks away and Adam goes back to Arena Tower the next day. He sees the device, it’s still there. He tries to touch it again, but he still can’t. The force field is still there, still keeping him away from touching it. Looking at the device, it has something...off. “*AriesPort* version 1.0,” it reads on the device. “*Contains UPAC-X. Use with Caution.*”

Adam read somewhere that UPAC-X was a mineral discovered as a big step towards time-travel. However, the mineral was only found in a select few rocks, deep underground. He had to know, where did the Auditor find it? He tried poking a stick at it, it didn’t budge. Needing more time to think he went to the hotel he was staying at and devised a new plan.

Adam wakes up the next morning to thunder. It’s pouring outside. However, Adam doesn’t see this as a problem, though. He looks at this as a chance, a chance to sneak into

Arena Tower and see what *Aries* was. It's three in the morning, but he has woken up. It was a weird reflex he has. Next thing he knows, *Aries* is on his shelf.

"Hello," *Aries* calls.

"W-Who Are You" Adam says in fear.

"The name's *Aries*, I've heard something with my time vortex. People from different dimensions are coming to this world." *Aries* says.

"I've noticed," Adam replies. They start to work together to take down the Auditor. They see the Auditor through the window outside in the thunderstorm. They come out to fight the Auditor.

"Why hello dear cousin," the Auditor snickered.

"Y-You are the cousin with this thing?" Adam asked in shock.

"It's true, " *Aries* says.

The Auditor says, "You should just tell him the real story, *Aries* or should I just say Ada-"

"BLAH-BLAH-BLAH" *Aries* interrupts. He kicks the Auditor in the face. "Let's get out of here" *Aries* screams. Suddenly the Auditor gets struck by lightning and absorbs the electricity, the Auditor explodes thunder out of himself, making the outdoors appear like broad daylight for a split second. The electricity cracks the forcefield, but nobody notices. They flee from the Auditor. trying to brainstorm different ways to solve this. Sadly, no ideas were made.

Suddenly, Adam asks, “What was the Auditor saying?”

Aries takes a deep sigh. “He was gonna say: Or should I say Adam” Aries replies.

“WHAT?! WHY ME” Adam asks.

“It's not you, it's us,” Aries says. Aries takes off his helmet and it was Adam but from a different universe. Adam stands there in shock.

“Wait, you're Adam?” Adam says.

“That's Aries to you” Aries says. “And that Auditor you saw. That's our ‘cousin’. Yours and mine. He has been infected by the corruption and if he spreads it here... oh boy, it's not gonna look pretty,” Aries says.

“Wait, that's my... ‘cousin’?” Adam asks.

“Well, he used to be...” Aries replies.

... 3 months later ...

Adam looks outside the window. White flakes falling from the heavens; it's snowing. “It's winter. But it would've been more fun if Brody was here with me” Adam sorrowfully says. He asks Aries if they wanna go back and fight, and Aries agrees. They go back. They noticed the machine's forcefield was cracked.

“Ah, it's my Time Warp model 1.0” Aries exclaims.

“You made that?” Adam questions.

Aries replies “Mhm, and it seems like the forcefield is cracked. If we can break it we might be able to destroy th-”

“GET AWAY FROM THAT!” the Auditor screams, out of nowhere. “So it’s a fight you want, it’s a fight you’ll GET!” the Auditor says.

Aries tackles the Auditor, he quickly gets up and knocks him away he charges at Adam. “AHHHHHHHHH!” Adam screamed. Last second, Aries blocked the punch but faints on the ground giving Adam enough time to do a deadly uppercut. The Auditor gets knocked away as Adam punches him left and right. The Auditor pushes him off, and picks up some snow, throwing it at Adam. Adam gets stunned from the wet, frosty snow, and the Auditor right hooks him.



THUNDER BREAK

Aries gets up to run, bringing Adam on his back. He got back to the hotel waiting for Adam to recover. Aries tries to brainstorm how to kill the Auditor and to get through that time loop. He realizes that the Auditor's thunder must've broken the forcefield, so he thinks other types of electricity can break the forcefield.

“Adam,” Aries finally breaks the silence.

Adam tries to mutter something, but nothing Aries can comprehend.

“At least you're awake,” Aries says. Aries goes back to thinking. “My Time Warp model can probably go back in time,” Aries thought aloud. “But I have never tested it. It is too dangerous for us both to go. Especially you in this state. We need to wait for you to recover. I'll be back Adam. I'll just try to research some things.”

Adam says nothing. He has fallen asleep.

Aries goes down to the town library. He finds a book: “UPAC-X: What is it?” He picks it up and starts to read.

UPAC-X, or Universe-Powered Adjustment Controller Material Ten, can be used to traverse through time and space,

but may mutate a human that uses it. To use it, you must follow a certain guideline and regulated circuit. This circuit must NOT be modified as required under all national and international laws. Remember: UPAC-X must be electrically charged in order to operate.

Aries continues to read the book, and brings it home, walking along the snowy path, and the rumbling thunder in the distance. He realizes the Auditor is coming, fast. He rushes to the hotel only to find that Adam is missing. "ADAM? ADA-" He stops upon notice of blood writing on the wall.

*COME IF YOU WANT HIM BACK! MY OLD FRIEND,
I WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU. Luckster Forest 5482*

He runs to Luckster Forest looking for a house. He finds a log cabin. "5482". He realizes it was the house. He barges in. "COME OUT" he screams.

Adam comes out of the shadows, "It's fine, I'm fine."

"This isn't your Adam," the Auditor pops up. "He's mine now," the Auditor says.

"TIME TO DIE! ADAM, GET HIM!" the Auditor demands.

Adam luges at Aries. "ADAM IT'S ME!!! ITS ARIES!"

Adam is unfazed from his line of speech. Aries kicks off Adam. "Oh god," Aries says. Luckily Adam has been knocked

out.

He carries him to the hotel and leaves him contained in his room. He finds some sort of corruption goo. “This is probably what made him control Adam,” He does tests on the goo. “Fire... It's weak to fire. But I can't burn him. WAIT! What's my weakness? If we are the same being, we must have the same weaknesses.” He remembers that Adam got stunned in the cold, and he is too. He gasps. “Coldness!”

He checks the weather report. “99 degrees?! But there's snow on the ground. Meteorologists are dumb these days.”

But it isn't the weatherman's fault. Behind the scenes, the Auditor was wiring up his new-found puppets and executing his plan. The weathermen are now the killer men.

Over in the Center for Meteorology and Climatology of Pennsylvania, the Auditor was in the server room. He had accessed the global models, and now was ready to fake the weather.

Now, the forecast models show snow in 81 degrees, a tornado but no clouds, and temperatures reaching as low as -88 degrees and as high as 157 degrees, being only 7 miles apart. The weathermen, quick to realize that there was no way this was possible, head to the server room to check what is up. There, they see, the Auditor was messing up their forecasts. They try to call security, but the Auditor is already two steps ahead. He stuffed the weary meteorologists into a potato sack, stating, “Fresh and Idaho Grown!” in a weird and forced farmer accent.

He takes out a batch of weird goo, and forces it into them. The weathermen have been brainwashed by the goo, and now are under the Auditor's rule.

Back in the hotel, Aries cannot figure out what went wrong with the weather. He needs the cold to be out there. It simply is not cold enough anymore, though. He tries watching the television, but alas, no one was there to report anything. It seems like the world has changed. The world is glitching.

IV

THE CORRUPTION SPREADS

Adam tries to mutter something. *He's awake!* But he's still very unstable and barely moving. Aries brews up a quick tea. But then, in a sudden and unexpected manner, Adam knocks Aries down and injects some black goo in him too. But somehow, in some way, he manages to get the upper hand on the corruption for a short period. "I feel it coursing through my veins. I don't have much time before it takes control." His voice becomes muffled, and a splitting headache forms. Aries falls to the ground, then knocked unconscious. He wakes up in a test chamber.

"Corruption Version B 2.1. 42% complete. Chamber 102," the electronic board shows.

"AH, I got to get out of this thing!" Adam punches as hard as he can, and the glass shatters into many pieces.

Instantly, a series of red lights flash before him. "ALERT ALERT. TEST TUBE 102, SECTION B, HAS BROKE FREE. ALL STAFF AND THE AUDITOR REPORT TO THE SITE IMMEDIATELY," the alarm goes.

"GOD... I GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!" Aries thinks to himself. He takes the electronic board with him.

“Stop right there! We got you cornered.” A controlled guard says. Suddenly his corruption breaks though.

“AGHHHH!” In one effort, he kicks down all of the staff in one devastating swing.

“What the? H-ho-how did this happen?” Aries says to himself.

“Hello Adam...” a voice says.

“WHO IS THAT?” Aries says in fear.

“It's me, Alan... Your corruption. I scanned your head and you got skills, I'm impressed. I won't control you.. Yet. Instead I will help you.” Aries's corruption says. *“I will help you get Ada- err- yourself.”*

“Err... okay?” Aries says. “I guess I'll trust you. How would you do that?”

“We have to find the Auditor and lock him down. Then he cannot control anyone anymore. But first we— I mean you— have to leave. I'll leave this up to you.”

Aries looks around in the dull and gray walls of the facility. He hears footsteps coming for him. Only one person, however. The Auditor is on his way. Aries has to run away, fast.

He finds a door on the other side of the facility. He tries to open it, but it requires a password. While he tries to open it, the Auditor walks in on the door opposite. Aries, now knowing he won't get out anytime soon, turns around, slowly.

“Hello, Aries. How are you? I hope you're doing fine.”

“I'm really not.”

“Anyways, ready to begin testing? I see you are already trying to leave. But that lock has a password that can only be keyed using what I call The Code of Kai.”

“Kai... that name seems familiar.”

“He was one of the first people to be tested by the corruption goo you may have seen. It gives me ultimate control. The code relates to that.”

“Kai... he’s Brody’s father. I remember Adam talking a lot about him. What happened here?”

“You cannot know.”

The corruption returns. “*The code is 0601-2012,*” he tells Aries. Aries listens intently.

“Anyways, let’s begin our first test! Come with me.”

Aries ignores him. He turns around swiftly, and inputs the code hastily into the keypad. Zero. Six. Zero. One. Two. Zero. One. Two.

“ACCESS GRANTED,” says the keypad.

“WAIT, STOP RIGHT THERE!” the Auditor screams at Aries. Aries says nothing, and runs out the door. The Auditor chases after him. Luckily Aries hides behind the building.

“*Wait... You’re forgetting something aren’t you*” The corruption says.

“Pfft, what could I possibly forget? I’m Aries, I never forge—” Aries realizes. “I left Kai and Adam didn’t I?” Aries lets out a sigh.

“*Mhm. I’ll try to inform you next time, but you better*

listen to me.” The corruption says.

“Got it, but we have to go back in, Okay, 0601-2– erm... what goes next?” Aries asks in shame.

“*012. 0601-2012. Remember this,*” the corruption says.

“Okay...,” Aries replies.

Aries hears the Auditor coming right up behind him. He has to leave in an instant. As the Auditor dashes toward him, he hurdles as fast as he can. As he takes strides toward the city of Harrisburg, he sees the rising sun. *I had to have been knocked out since last night,* he thinks. But there is no time for wasted thought, since the Auditor is only just a few steps away from him.

“Send out the Weathermen!” The Auditor commands. One by one a swarm piles up behind him, screaming and running, distracting Aries.

“*Do not worry. There is a vehicle right ahead. Take that to the city, and get to your hotel. Fast,*” the corruption requests. Aries, already exhausted by running, hops into the car, and drives as fast as he can to the city.

About eight minutes later, he enters the city. To his surprise, the Auditor was not chasing after him anymore. But then Aries cannot brake.

“WHAT?! I CAN’T STOP THE CAR!” Aries panics. “Oh no.”

The car accelerates faster, and faster. The hotel is just ahead, and he is about to crash into it. “SOMEONE PLEASE

HELP US!”

And then, the car slams to the wall of the hotel with immense force. Windows and foundation have been decimated into oblivion. However, the car remains whole, and Aries, bracing for his demise, peers up, only to find that he is still alive.

The Auditor broadcasts on the radio to the car. “Well, you have fallen for my trap. That car you are in, it is mine. You and your dire mistakes.”

People just walking by are surprised that the car did not get decimated by the crash. Aries, still shaken, comes out and instantly meets concerned spectators, flashing lights, and paramedic crews.

A person asks him, “How are you still conscious? That crash like that would have knocked someone out and perhaps killed them.” Aries did not have an answer. He simply didn’t know.

V

THE HUNT FOR KAI

“Oh god, my back... It hurts,” Ariès says. His vision narrows, eyes flicker. Soon enough, he topples over. He wakes up inside the test tube again. “It’s this thing again. Heh, time to break this tube once more.” He punches the tube with all of his might, but he can’t break it.

“Hello Adam, nice to see you back. Oh, would you look at that, 87% done! Luckily for you, I can speed it up,” the Auditor says with pleasure.

“89%, 93%, 99%, 100%! Heh, now you’re under my control now...” the Auditor chuckled.

“Adam... Adam? Are you there? He powered up the corruption, that must mean I’m stronger, But now it’s my time to control,” The corruption goes.

Ariès’s corruption controls his body. “AGH!” corrupted Ariès goes.

He punches the glass with his newfound power. The Auditor gives a grin. The glass shatters around him once more, Ariès escapes the tube. “0601-2012” he says to himself. This time, however, the code did not work.

The Auditor chuckles. “Did you think I would not have

changed the password from last time? I'm not stupid. Anyways, you're fully corrupted now. I'll open the door to the first test. Come on."

Aries ignores him. Even if he were to be corrupt, he would still be self-conscious. The first corruption overpowers it.

"Just follow him. I'll tell you where to go once it appears," the Corruption advises. Aries goes into the test chamber, following the Auditor.

"Welcome to your first test. This one's a simple one. Solve the problem: $9+10$," the Auditor announces. Aries knows definitely that the answer is 21. He inputs it into the keypad, and then the next door opens. "Great job. Now enter the door to the next test."

Aries encounters a fork in the hallway. "Come here, turn left. That's the next test."

The corruption returns once more. *"Turn right, and book it. NOW."* Aries doesn't hesitate. There's a sign ahead, it reads, "BODY STORAGE ROOM."

That must be it! Aries thinks to himself. There's a door right up ahead.

"You don't want to go there!" the Auditor yells at Aries. He keeps running. "YOU DON'T WANT TO GO THERE. STOP THAT!"

The Auditor hits a button. "ATTENTION. ATTENTION. FULL LOCKDOWN STARTING IN 30 SECONDS. ALL WORKERS REPORT TO THE BODY STORAGE ROOM

IMMEDIATELY.”

Aries approaches the door, and opens it. He enters the largest hall he has ever seen. Tubes and capsules surround something that’s called the Vault. “ALERT! TEST SUBJECT 102 HAS ENTERED THE BODY STORAGE ROOM,” the speaker announces loudly.

Aries looks behind him and sees a swarm of the Auditor’s goons. As he runs from them, he approaches the Vault. *SUBJECTS 000 to 002*. He realizes these are Adam, Brody, and Kai in the Vault.

Back when Aries was captured, the Auditor took Adam with him. It was all part of the plan, capture people to use later. That’s why the Body Storage Room exists. The Auditor is building his army, to rule the world through his corruption.

...

Kai wasn’t killed. When the Auditor lunged at him, he sneakily applied the corruption goo. This made him pass out almost immediately, letting the Auditor place him in the Body Storage Room. It’s the same case for Brody, it wasn’t Aries’s machine that killed him, even the forcefield, which was designed not to injure. It was the Auditor. He snuck up behind him and did the same thing. And Adam, he was the final victim of the Auditor’s tactic.

Aries doesn’t connect the dots until now. The Auditor has been lying all this time.

“Stop, my goons,” the Auditor commands, and his goons

listen. “Aries, get out of here now, or you’re going to be the next one in the Vault.”

Aries steps back a little. “Tell me, Auditor. What’s in the Vault?”

“Why should I tell you?”

“Shut up. Tell me what’s in the Vault.”

“Okay, fine. The Vault contains YOUR MOM!!!” the Auditor laughs. Aries, mildly annoyed, takes a few steps forward.

“Tell. Me.”

“No. GOONS ATTACK!”

“*You need to leave. I know the password to override the lockdown,*” the corruption tells Aries. As the goons approach him, Aries kicks them and runs. He waits for the corruption’s signal. “*The code is 8712-0009.*”

Aries puts in the code. Eight. Seven. One. Two. He glances behind him. The large swarm of goons inch ever closer. Zero. Zero. Zero. Nine. The code opens the door.

Aries slams the door behind it and runs as fast as possible. In an act of deception, he takes the stairs to the Arena Tower. “This should buy me some time,” Aries mutters to himself. And sure it did, the goons scour the facility where Aries isn’t. He checks the upper levels, now empty, except for one office. This is the Auditor’s control room. He encounters a room full of folders on drawers and a panel of computers and servers. On the table is a diagram of the facility. Ten test chambers, forty

offices, two security rooms, and the Body Storage room. He takes this diagram and goes to the hotel, looking sure that no goons are behind him.

...

The next day, Aries pulls out the diagram. He knows that the Auditor is on the hunt once again. He realizes the Auditor left a schedule behind.

“Heh, so he is going to purge in like 28 minutes, I can probably sneak in and grab Kai, Brody and Adam,” Aries thinks to himself. He goes inside the building once more. He looks for the vault. “Nothing, dang it!” Aries complains. Suddenly, the Auditor comes in behind him.

“Oh, oh, oh. Would you look at that, you thought I would go on my purge? You gullible little fool.”

“*Don’t worry, this is all part of my plan,*” the corruption goes.

“So, what brings you here? You want to be our next Vault member?”

“*Aries, you need to find the key,*” the corruption speaks to him. “*The red key. It opens Adam’s chamber.*”

Aries listens. He remembers seeing the key on his belt during a previous encounter, but he always keeps it locked down.

“You should leave. There’s nothing here for you except suffering,” the Auditor advises. Surprisingly, Aries listens, and takes the exit out.

VI

WARPED VISION

The next day, thinking of solutions to this seemingly brick wall, Aries notices something. The Time Warp 1.0 is vibrating, and lighting up. “No... it’s impossible. Who’s coming into our universe?”

A person appears in front of him. A small, but strong build, almost like the Auditor. “Hey, Aries? What are you doing here? You’ve been gone for, like, a month now!” he states, slightly annoyed.

“Auddie, I sensed I need to be here,” Aries responds. “And it is true. This universe needs— wait. Do you by any chance have a red key on you?”

“Yeah, why?”

“I need it. There’s no time for explanation. Go back home, I will be back soon,” Aries demands. Auddie, somewhat hesitant, reluctantly gives the key to Aries.

“Okay, I guess. See you soon, then.”

In the middle of the night, when the Auditor is sleeping, Aries sneaks in to save Adam. But suddenly, the lights turn on. “Hello again.”

Aries runs faster. He has the key to save Adam, thanks to

his cousin from another universe. All he needs to do is turn it.

“Oh, where are you going? There’s no use. I am the only one who can open that Vault. You can’t save them.”

“Oh yeah?” Aries interjects. He holds up the lustrous metal key coated in red dye. He has a mischievous smirk on his face, and now he is turning in the vault.

“WAIT, WHAT!? WHERE’D YOU GET THAT?” the Auditor, confused and furious, shoves Aries aside. But it is too late. Adam has been released from the chamber.

“Adam, run. Go straight to the hotel now,” Aries demands.

“Where the heck am I?”

“GO NOW. THERE’S NO TIME.” Adam runs off to the exit.

“Well, I guess you’re his new replacement.” The Auditor pushes Aries into the Vault.

“WAIT, NO. LET ME OUT! LET ME OUUUUT!!!!” Aries screams to the top of his lungs. As the Vault door closes, his scream becomes more muffled, until it is inaudible. The Auditor switches the chamber on, and now Aries has been locked in the Vault.

At the Hotel, Adam is still getting his bounds right. The corruption has faded in his time in the Vault. He barely remembers a thing. All he remembers is that he went into a forest cabin and the Auditor says, “It’s time to control you. You’re next, Adam.”

He peers over onto his grainy, wooden desk. He notices that Aries's stuff is still there. The deep blue blueprints, a rainbow of fountain pens, and a notebook. Behind him, he can still see the faded red paint on the wall. Five, four, eighty-two, he can make out. But what brings him the most attention is Aries's Time Warp model 1.0. It's... flashing. He walked over to it. The display states, "New Interuniversal Message: 'Aries! Where have you been? All of Harrison City is worried about you.' Auddie Feb 1 22 Time 22:16."

Adam remembers Aries came in from that Time Warp. Auddie... it must be their universe's Auditor. Aries's cousin. They must be looking all around for him. But there's a problem.

Aries needs to be saved.

VII

VENGEANCE FOR BRODY

The next day, Adam wakes up to his phone beeping a thousand times a second. He looks at it. There's messages from an unknown number. Although unaware of who is texting him, he looks at the messages.

> Adam. It's me, Aries. Well, his corruption. Technically, Alan. A friendly corruption, in your terms.

> Well, I know you want to save your friend. Auditor has a plan to use him to sneak corruption onto the whole world. You need to stop him, and free Brody before it's too late.

> Read Aries's notebook and refer to the Diagram. You need to find the Green Key. That will open the Vault. But you need stealth. That I cannot help with.

> Don't worry about Aries. The Auditor is still figuring out what to do with him.

> Logging off.

Adam does a double-take. Brody is alive. *Alive!*

"But... How am I gonna help—" Adams voice cuts off to realize there is another message.

Hello... Hello? If you are seeing this Adam, I want you to know that I have a way to talk to you. If you go into the computer, and search: www.kingtalk102/2834867, you can talk to me. Good luck Adam, the fates up to you...

Of course Adam takes this with caution.

“2834867? What does it mean—“ He halts suddenly. As he goes to his phone, he realizes the letters match up. A-U-D-I-T-O-R is in the letters in the keypad, 2834867. It’s the Auditor. He’s looking for him. “It must be the controlled Aries, the other corruption got him. If we can get the other one he can help us” Adam says.

Adam takes his next few steps cautiously. First, he goes on a trip to Mary’s house with newfound information. He rings the bell.

“Adam, haven’t seen you in a while. How’ve you been?” Mary welcomes Adam into her house.

“It’s a long story. But with that I have new knowledge.”

“What knowledge?”

“Brody might still be alive. Under Arena Tower by the edge of the city there’s a facility. That’s the Auditor’s laboratory. I think — no, I know that he’s in there. In a specialized vault.”

“Wait, WHAT?! He’s still alive?” Mary says, surprised.

“Yep. What we need to do is to find a green key. I have this diagram of the lab. It shows a ‘Security Room’. I can probably sneak in, but I can’t do it alone.”

“What if I go in and distract him? Then you can go in

and sneak in.”

“That could work, but there’s a caveat. Any time I go into the Lab, the alarm sounds. We need to disable it.” Adam’s phone rings once more. It’s from the corruption’s number.

“8981-1018. That’s the code.”

“Mary, we can do this.”

After a thirty-minute long drive, they arrive at the tall, shining spike scraping the sky. Arena Tower.

“If you find a keypad anywhere, enter the code.” Adam hands a card to Mary. She goes into the large shard of a building.

Mary is apprehensive about what’s going to happen. It’s going to be tough, but her husband is there. She must save him, she thought. As she walks through the barely-lit halls, she notices a slight glistening light from the corner of her eye. A shard of glass. She looks around her, and sees where it came from. A shattered portrait of a man, with a smile as bright as the sun.

“Hey,” a man says. It’s one of the Auditor’s goons. Mary is surprised by this, but she keeps her stance.

“Hi, can you tell me where the Auditor is? I am a reporter wishing to talk about the great architecture this place has,” Mary says, obviously lying.

“Yeah, sure. Head down the stairs, room 169. But before you go, do you have I.D.?”

Mary takes out her I.D. and gives the card to the goon. They scan it, and let her on her way. As she walks down the

stairs. she notices a keypad. Mary inputs the code. *8981-1018*. “ACCESS PASSWORD NEEDED. ENTER PASSWORD CODE.” Mary thinks for a second. She notices all the letters except A, D, I, O, R, T, and U are faded. Mary realizes. Auditor! She types it in. “ACCESS GRANTED. ALARM TURNED OFF.” She then goes down to the security room, and grabs the key.

Adam waits on the opposite side of the lab, in the Body Storage Room. Mary makes her way through the noodle system that is the hallways. As she passes the keys to Adam, she hears footsteps in the distance. “Unlock it, then hide. Fast,” Mary whispered to Adam. *Tap*.

Adam runs towards the lock and turns it. *Tap*. He then dashes and hides behind the green, shiny tubes that are part of the Vault. *Tap*. Mary walks up towards the Vault. *Tap*.

“Well, well, well, it’s—” the Auditor is shocked to see that she is not Adam. “Who are you?”

“It’s too late.”

“What do you mean? Nothing’s late with me,” the Auditor chuckles. And in reality, Mary is already too late. The Auditor steps aside to reveal Brody.

“Oh gosh, Brody it-its you!” Mary cheered. Brody is silent. Her joy is cut off, something is wrong. “Brody, are you okay?” Mary says in fear.

“!eid oT emiT ,yram olleH” Brody says. It’s gibberish.

“What-What are you saying Brody?” Mary stuttered. Brody lunges at Mary, but Adam comes in from the side and blocks him. Another door opens, its Aries. Luckily, he fought off the evil side of the corruption.

“Au- Auditor... if *that's* Brody, what's in the Vault?” Mary questions.

“I'll show you.” The Auditor reveals what's inside the Vault. It's a note.

“Too late.”

“I anticipated your coming even before you partnered up with Mary, Adam,” the Auditor explains. “I saw the messages. I knew every move.”

“Adam, we need to go restore Brody, fast. Find where the corruption is and—”

“SHUT IT OR I KILL YOU,” the Auditor interrupts.

“Aries, why did you not do that when you had the chance?”

“Whoops. Forgot. I may not look like it, but I am as forgetful as you are?”

“Blah, blah, blah. Can we get to the part where I kill you?” the Auditor says impatiently. Aries runs, and the Auditor and corrupted Brody chases after him. “You will never win! The Auditor prevails in the end! You've tried, tried, and tried some more. Guess what? You never succeed. The tables were never turned to you. It's MY SPOTLIGHT.”

“Guess what. You forgot Adam.”

Adam runs to the main office, and locates the walls of red and green lights flashing before his eyes. “Come on, come on, Where is the corruption?” He spots a folder called *BRODY’S CORRUPTION*. But before he can delete the folder, he gets distracted by the person who approaches him from the corner of his eye. “Brody... is that you?”

“!eid ,madA .mih dnuoF,” Brody’s voice is incomprehensible.

“Please Brody, it’s me, Adam! Come on, I’m your cousin. Remember the fun times we had?” Adam tries to convince him. Brody hears none of it. He lunges straight for Adam.

“Remember that time when we tried to drop into that well in the park? Or went to that store and tried to buy our own phones? Yeah... good times, right?” Brody picks up a knife. As it inches toward Adam, he tips slowly backwards. “Come on. You’re not like this. Never like this.” Brody points his knife and extends his arm, and Adam stumbles to the table. Brody grunts. The knife moves with startling force. And then, he stops.

Adam looks over. “Folder successfully deleted.” He did it. He beat corrupted Brody.

Adam, Mary, and Aries run back home. With Brody in Adam’s arms, unconscious and tired, Mary asks Aries, “By the way, who really are you?”

“I’m Aries? Am I not?”

“Well, you are not from this universe? Are you?”

“I’m not, but there’s a weird way I got here. It was one dreary afternoon, back at my dwelling. I was crafting this new device, one that can travel in time. I was part of the Science and Technology Bureau, and they wanted me to research some ‘UPAC’ or something.

“So there I was, with my newly crafted device. And then I feel something. A feeling of something wrong. Not with the chemicals, no, a feeling in my head. So I look left, and right, and hit the button. Then I appear in a familiar room, and I see someone in bed. That person was Adam.”

“But who are you *exactly*? What’s behind that helmet of yours?” Mary questions.

“I can’t take off this helmet, unfortunately. Your air is different from ours, so this helmet is something I devised for universe traveling. But, I am very similar to Adam. I can show you a few pictures,” Aries replies. He takes out a phone, and searches for pictures.

“See, here,” Aries says. Mary peers over, and flicks over to Adam. Adam looks, too.

“Woah, you two are very similar,” Mary expressed.

“Yeah, we really are. I’ve made friends with myself!” Adam jokes. But they do not laugh. They notice something back inside the house. The table is shaking, actually, everything is. They look at the couch. Brody is having massive spasms.

“BRODY! Are you okay?” Adam runs over.

“im find des prob th tro in
Ar y ower ena ab e Ad ili
am er ty T.” Brody’s words are shuffled, but after
that, the spasms end.

“What...? Brody, talk to me,” Adam says. Brody does
not respond after that. Instead, he snores silently, and Adam
sighs.

VIII

PUZZLED

“Good grief. You scared me half to death!” Adam says. Remember when Aries was in a test tube with an electronic board that he took? He realizes that there was electricity in it, strong enough to break through the forcefield of the Time Warp. As they break the Time Warp’s forcefield, Adam puts down Brody, and steps in.

“WAIT!” Aries screamed. “You need to go in with a rope!”

“Oh yeah,” Adam replies. They put the rope on Adam and he jumps in. “WHAT THE?!” Adam screams in fear.

“You’re too late now. When I get into your dimension, your world will know how to party!” a loud voice echoes. They pull out Adam.

“What did you see Adam?” Aries questions.

“eye eno tsuj htiw nomaed eht raef ,enots sa kciht dna kcalb sa traeh .livE” Adam replies. “This is too dangerous, I cant let anyone go in there.”

“Tell us what you saw Adam,” Aries asks.

“I can’t.” Adam replies. “It’s indescribable. But there was a voice. Something about being ‘too late,’ and ‘how to

party.’ And my voice... I said something. But I can’t remember it. I think I was being controlled.”

“We’ll need to stay on high alert, then. But we need to figure out what happened to Brody. The things he said, I think his words were shuffled.”

“I can pull up the security footage. Maybe we can see what he said,” Mary recommends.

They head to her computer. “We can piece together the parts.”

	<i>im</i>	<i>find</i>	<i>des</i>	<i>prob</i>	<i>th</i>	<i>tro</i>	<i>in</i>
<i>Ar</i>	<i>y</i>	<i>ower</i>	<i>ena</i>	<i>ab</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>Ad</i>	<i>ili</i>
<i>am</i>	<i>er</i>	<i>ty</i>	<i>T.</i>				

“Well, we know we have to ‘find’ something.”

“‘prob’ might be ‘probable’”

“Or ‘improbable’”

They argue for a while, but then Aries feels something. “Oh, shoot.”

“What?” Mary and Adam ask simultaneously, concerned.

“Someone is entering through the time loop,” Aries explains. “We have about 2 minutes to prepare before they come in.”

“But who are they? Or is it? Whatever.”

“From what the time loop is saying, it’s the same time

hole we dropped you in.”

“SHOOT!” Adam realizes. “The... the...”

“Adam, no need to say anything. We need to find weapons, just in case.”

“I have a baseball bat!” Mary says. “Actually, quite a few. Brody used to play baseball.”

“AH, HA, HA, HA, HA. HA. YOU FOOLS, I WILL END YOU,” the voice says.

“Wha-What? who are you?” Aries says in fear.

“The name’s Auditor. Well Auditor Cipher to be exact. I destroyed my world and now it’s time to destroy yours,” Auditor Cipher claims.

“What...? Wait. Auditor?” Aries looks over at Mary, still clenching the bat. “Give me that.” He takes the baseball bat, and swings, but before he can hit him, he disappears.

Adam looks at Mary. Mary looks at Aries. Aries, still staring at the bat he holds, stands there confused.

As the Auditor works on his new plans, he notices a silhouette in the distance.

“Who are you?” The Auditor’s voice echoes down the hall.

“What? Who are you?” Auditor Cipher says.

“I’m the Auditor. My goal is to destroy this planet, and then the next one.”

“No, it can’t be. There can only be ONE AUDITOR!”

The Auditor gets up. “Stop your nonsense. COME OUT OF THE HALLS! They get into a fight and hit each other. But as they fight, it puts too much strain on the timeline, because there can't be two Auditors in one world. Their power is too strong. One hit after another, they start merging, and the ground shakes under them. In a matter of time, they are mixed together to make one heck of a beast. Known as **Auditor Preflux**.

“**Woah... This power, it's good... I can get used to this. Ah, ha, ha.**” Auditor Preflux says.

“Did... did you hear him?” Adam says, slightly traumatized. “That voice. It's like... wavy..”

“I've been to his universe, before it was destroyed,” Ariès responds. “Everyone there speaks in that type of voice. Their planet was beautiful and luscious. Man, it's sad to see it destroyed. I'm not gonna let that happen to you, Adam.”

The door creaks open. It's Brody, he has woken up. “Mary? What... happened?”

“Oh, morning! Uh... it's a long story. Go brew yourself a tea. I'll be there in a moment.”

Ariès looks back toward the computer. “Brody... *'find improbable'*. What could that mean? What could that mean?” Ariès mumbles to himself. He comes into deep thought.

Adam walks toward the kitchen. He sees Brody over there by the stove. “Hey, Brody, how've you been?”

“Honestly, I don't know. All I remember was being shocked by a device. I thought it was a phone! And then

everything between now and then is a blur.”

“You’ve been out for a long time. Like, about four months. I thought you were dead. That man...his name is Auditor. He controlled you. For a long time. But I found that device you got shocked by. And that’s why Aries is here.”

“Who’s Aries?”

“He is not from this universe. He came in through that time loop, and now he has helped me find you. Don’t worry about it now, your mind has been... shuffled.”

“What do you mean?” Brody questions.

“Well... you can barely remember anything but, all I can say is that you have been controlled. But you aren’t alone, I got kidnaped then got infected.” Adam says.

“Family meeting, Family meeting!” Aries screams. They all gather up. “I made a lot of machines when I was in my dimension. I had entries, pages and paragraphs from plenty of years of hard work in my journal. I lost it. It had other monsters you needed to worry about, sadly... I can’t get them out of the portal.”

“Even though I can’t get my journals out, I’ve managed to snag one of my inventions.” Aries puts out a gun-like invention.

“Ooo, What is it?” They all question.

“It’s a *memory gun*. Able to erase any memory and anything inside it.” Aries answers “Brody, Mary, I have a job for you. I managed to stabilize the portal for a while. Do you mind

looking for my journals? There should be 3 of them.”

“Okay. We got it,” Brody and Mary replies. They go in the portal with a rope attached to them.

“As for you Adam, come follow me.” Aries asks. They went to a bookshelf and opened it. It reveals an elevator.

“What the?” Adam says.

“Shh. Keep this a secret.” Aries says quietly. They enter the elevator and go down to the level below. The awkward silence “Welcome to my private study.”

“Oh god. This is your study?” Adam asks. He tries to pull out a sheet but gets interrupted by Aries talking.

“Come along Adam, come” Aries says. “I might’ve found a way to ‘Auditor-proof’ the place, but I need my journals. But if I can find my old house, we can stay there in my true study room.”

“How can we find your house if we aren’t in your dimension?” Adam asks.

“Well, I’ve noticed that different landmarks have landed to this dimension, let’s hope the shack is there with it.” Aries says.

“Okay.” Adam replies. The ground shakes, somebody is going through the portal. Adam and Mary go through the portal.

“I GOT ONE!” Mary claims.

“NO, I GOT IT” Brody exclaims. They argue about it, both pulling on it like a game of tug of war..

They head back up. “My Journal. Number 3!” Aries says

with joy. The ground rumbles once more. They see a shack in the distance.

“Is... Is that it?” Adam asks.

“Yep. That’s it!” Aries says. “As for you, Brody and Mary, you try getting the other two journals. Just try keeping the time warps stable, alright?”

“Got it.” The two walk back over to the timehole, and Adam and Aries go to the shack.

“Well, in order to ‘Auditor-proof’ the house,” Aries says, “we should use the same technology that I used to create the forcefield for the Time Warp. But, it’ll be a pain to upscale it. I think that the limit was a fifth of an acre. But this property has, like, 2 acres, and I want to cover it all, so that we have a good amount of space to work with.”

“I’ll try my best to help.” They notice someone coming into the yard, it’s Brody and Mary.

“Hey, we found your other journals!” Mary tells Aries.

“I appreciate it,” Aries thanks them both.

A loud thud, almost like thunder, is heard from the distance. “But I closed the warp. What was that?” Brody asks, worried.

“Oh no. The Rifts are starting.”

“What are the Rifts?”

“The fourth dimension, time itself, it’s unstable. We have caused too much strain, and the universes will start blending,” Aries says, “I expected this. Once the landmarks came, I knew it

was beginning. I just thought they would end sooner.

“Ah ha! I got it, I can stabilize the Rift, but if it breaks the Auditor’s minions and his friends will leak into this universe. And the end of the multiverse itself.”

“Well that's a risk I'm willing to take.” Brody says confidently. As Aries stabilizes the rift, Auditor Preflux visits them.

“Alright you single-life organisms, I own this property, now bow to me. Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha.”

“Never!” they all shout.

“Then I guess it's my turn to pla-. IS THAT THE RIFT?! Oh I've been waiting so long for this moment. srekcus won tfir eht em eviG” Auditor Preflux dashes for the rift, but only to be blocked by Aries. ***“I have to say, you got guts; what's the point in fighting you? But I'll be watching you.”*** Auditor Preflux vanishes.

“Wha- What was that thing?” Brody asks.

“It's Auditor Preflux. Give me the journals Brody and Mary,” Aries says. “Alright to Auditor-proof the shack I need: Moon crystals, Check. Amethyst, Check. Mercury powder, Check. Newts blood, Check.”

“Blood?! Gross.” Mary applies.

“Do you want us to be safe or not? Thought so. Alright, so what's next? Oh yeah. Diamonds, Check. Now what else, I always forget the last ingredient...ugh, Growth crystals. They can only be found in one dimension but with the portal gone I

can't do anything." The ground shakes once again.

"Uhh can that be it?" The landmarks sent the growth crystals next to them. Aries Auditor-Proofs the shack. But he can only cover half of it.

"I need more amethyst." Aries says.

IX

REPAIRING THE SHACK

“Okay so... while I get amethyst, protect the shack for me okay?” Aries asks.

“Okay!” they all shout. Aries goes outside to look for amethyst.

“Guys, come,” Adam asks everyone. He leads them into Aries’s private study. “This is where he studied the Auditor and more.”

“Wow,” they all say in awe. Adam remembers he was going to pull a sheet off something but did not get the chance, so he pulls off the sheet. It reveals the Auditor’s original form wearing a crown with Aries.

“WAIT, ARIES AND AUDITOR?!” Adam screams. The elevator starts to whirl. The doors open, it’s Aries.

“You shouldn’t have done that,” Aries says furiously. Then the room spins; as Adam gets dizzy he snaps out of it.

“Wait, WHO ARE YOU? ARE YOU AUDITOR RIGHT NOW?” Adam says in fear.

“Just calm down, It’s me. Give me the rift, C-” Aries gets interrupted by Adam.

“COUSIN? WAS THAT WHAT YOU WERE GOING

TO SAY?” Adam questions. They all back up.

“I was gonna say ‘Come on’, kid, Hand over the rift, NOW.” Aries demands.

“He said to protect this rift with your life” Adam picks up the memory gun. “I’LL ERASE YOU OUT OF ARIES MIND”

“Calm down, Adam, Calm down.”

“Trust nobody, Trust nobody, TRUST NOBODY.” Adam shoots the memory gun. It bounces off and shoots one of his machines.

Adam backs away.

“Look, look. I can explain.” Aries says.

“AUGHH” They all scream.

“LOOK AT ME.” Aries takes off his helmet for a brief second. He gasps for air. “Look at my pupils. It's me, It's me.”

“I'm sorry, I thought you were the Auditor.” Adam says sadly.

“Look, I have a troubled past. I trusted the Auditor when I was young, he taught me how to make that warp. But I was a fool. I made a deal with him. I wanted to have a cousin. In my universe, I did not have a real cousin. So I trusted him, he gave me Auddie, he was my cousin. But his end of the bargain was letting him into my mind. Then I made this helmet, that was when I found out his plans. So I used the helmet so I can prevent him from coming into my mind,” Aries claims.

“I'm sorry Aries,” Mary comforts Aries.

“Thanks,” Aries says, “but this isn't the end of my story. So then I came to your universe. But Adam didn't find me yet.” Aries sits down. “I came here because this was the place he was striking next. But then I went back to my universe, since I wasn't prepared enough. Once I came back, I found Adam. And that's the end of my story.”

“Wow,” Adam says. “We will kill that Auditor, I promise.”

The ground shakes, more extreme than last time. “Oh no. He's coming.” Aries puts in the last of the amethyst in the forcefield. “Alright, we should be protected, at least for a bit.”

“What do we do to prepare? It's only a matter of time before he realizes he can break it.”

“I... I... it was a... device,” Brody says. “A drive, I remember. It was a while back, when I was looking for my father. Something...”

“Improbable?” Adam says, trying to jog his memory.

“I don't know. I... I used it to kill the boss in the Tower. It looked similar to the Warp. But it... it only made him grow stronger.”

“Wait,” Aries connects the dots. “I remember the Auditor, before he came to this place, he also talked about Arena Tower. Something about a dead man, and taking the form he kills. It was a while back, but there was a time...”

“Hold on,” Adam says, “I think I -” The ground shaking intensifies.

“IT WILL TAKE A LONG TIME TO BREAK THE FORCEFIELD UNLESS THE CORE IS GONE!” Aries screamed petrified.

“Well, well, well. My little puppet is here for an encore. Let's see what you got.” Auditor Preflux punches the shack but it's no use.

“What?! No, No, No, NO!” Auditor Preflux punches the shack left and right nonstop,

“Attack!” Mary screams.

“What the? AUGHHH.” Everyone gets out for a brief second to hit him,

“AUGHHHHH” Adam screams, Auditor Preflux grabs Adam, firm, hands stiff.

“It's my puppet! Well It's time to die!”

“NO YOU DON'T,” Brody hits him in the chest.

“Gahhh! I've got to go.” Auditor Preflux flees from the vicinity, dropping Adam as he runs.

“It's only a matter of time until he figures it out,” Aries says. “Remember, external electricity can deactivate it, and our shack will be destroyed in an instant.”

Brody stares in the same spot where Auditor Preflux was in, but only filled with faint, tall boxes instead of him.

“We have a plan,” Aries says, breaking the silence. “We need to find the drive you were talking about. But for that, we have to find what exactly it is. It'll be risky, but we need to find the Auditor's original laboratory, and steal some information.”

“Wait, so we’re going to your universe?”

“Yep. Get ready, we’re leaving first thing tomorrow morning.”

...

Aries wakes up the crew. The sun’s orange rays cast onto them, it’s early morning.

“Hold on, we’re leaving now? Not even a time for breakfast?” Brody groans.

“We need to go,” Aries responds. The ground rumbles once more, the Rifts are getting worse. “See that?”

Mary runs over to the living room. “What did I miss?”

“We’re just about ready to start,” Aries says. “You should hold the Time Warp open and then jump in. It should close after we’re in. Then I’ll use my Time Warp in my universe to get back.

“Ready everyone?”

Adam, Brody and Mary nod in agreement. Aries hits a few switches on the Time Warp. In front of him appears a deep hole, the portal to his universe.

“Jump in on three.”



A SACRED SWORD

They take a look at their surroundings.

“So, this is your real study, heh. It’s nice, real greety,” Mary says sarcastically. The faint dust around the study fills the room.

“Stay put, I’ll get oxygen tanks for you so you can breathe. Hopefully the portal doesn’t close too soon.” Aries walks over to the cabinet. Dust blinds him for a split second, but then he sees the oxygen tanks and a few of his helmets. He detaches the other tanks from the helmets and screws in the oxygen tanks. “Here. This should help you breathe as we find the Auditor’s old lair.”

Brody and Mary take a few moments to put on the helmets, as Aries removes his to get the fresh air. As they walk outside, Brody and Mary are astonished by the environment of the universe. A rose-colored sky and large modern houses and villages that seem to have come from 30 years in the future surround them. “Welcome to Harrison City, my friends.”

“Woah,” Adam says, lacking any other words.

“Don’t get off-task,” Aries advises. “We need to find it. I remember the address clearly. 8102 Bluewater Boulevard.” Aries

turns his head to a row of many bicycles. “Take one. They’re all mine.”

“Alright. I’ve been with the Auditor for some time, I should know where it is.” Aries claims.

“Aries,” Aries’ head turns to Brody, “Could that be it? That shady ally?”

“Precisely!” Aries says joyfully. They start looking for the Auditor’s lab,

“I think I found it, I think it's the sewer.” Mary says skeptically. Aries dust off the manhole cover.

Auditor Labs.

“Yep, that's alright.” Aries picks up the manhole. And just like that, they are in the Auditor’s old lab.

Fj pqfii txqzefkd, f tfii jxhb qebj prcbo

They climb down the rusty ladder, then they move through the empty corridors. Aries takes a glance at the laboratory.

“Well, well, well. My old friend is still looking for it. After all of these years, he knows I can only weld it.”

“Weld what?” Mary asks.

“The old sword, able to break universes. It can't go in the wrong hands.”

“What's it called?” Mary questions.

“The *Universe Blade*.” Aries answers. “You see, my research found this mystical aura. It was a blade. Apparently if you try to pull out the sword and you waste all of your energy,

you get sent into the Loop Realm.”

“What’s that?” Adam questions.

“An endless loop of universes. But he does realize that I can only hold the sword right. My DNA matches 99% with it, so I should be able to pull it out.” Aries claims. “We should head there, with the blade, and I think we can kill the Auditor once and for all.”

Xofbp fpk'q texq eb pxvp. Alk'q qorpq efj

“What’s up?” Adam asks. “You seem... apprehensive.”

“No, I’m fine. Thanks.” Aries seems a little suspicious. “Let’s get this sword out now.” Aries tries to take it out, but he tugs and tugs and can’t seem to dislodge it. “Huh.”

The vibrations become violent, tossing white figures around and scattering translucent pieces. “Let me pull it out,” Adam tries to ignore the shaking.

Outside, panic spreads throughout the city. “WHAT IS GOING ON?!” yells someone just above them.

“THIS IS NOT A DRILL,” a loudspeaker pierces their ears. “ALL CITIZENS SHOULD FIND A SAFE HIDEOUT IMMEDIATELY. THIS IS NOT A DRILL.”

“THIS IS THE END OF US!!” another person screams.

Cracking and snapping sounds can be heard from a distance. Dust flies across the room, choking Brody, Aries, and Mary, with the lime-colored shimmer of the Universe Blade being the only thing visible.

“The Rifts. They are spreading,” Mary realizes.

The familiar blue-ish light of the Time Warp grows, slowly, as it struggles to open. “Adam, try getting the blade, NOW!” Aries demands in a rush.

“Okay, okay, okay,” Adam hurries over to the faint glister of the Blade. As he tries to bring it out Auditor Preflux comes in,

“Thanks for doing the dirty work for me, I thank you. But I must pull the blade out”

Aries pushes Adam aside.

“You know what? Let me do it. My DNA matched with the sword. I will pull it out.” Aries tries to pull the blade out but it’s no use. He wasn’t the chosen one.

“GAHHH, IT HURTS.”

“But.. but you’re the chosen one.” Adam says

“I was... wait 99%! If you’re me you ca-” Aries starts turning blue as he fades away.

“Aries? ARIES WHERE ARE YOU?” Adam asks desperately.

“Awwww. Boo Hoo. He thought he was the chosen one. Even though his DNA was 99%! HA”

Adam thinks to himself “Aries had 99% of getting the blade, how?! WAIT HE’S ME.” Adam runs to the blade. “Sorry Auditor, but this blade belongs to me.”

“Ha. Like you can pull it out.” Auditor Preflux chuckles, slowly turning into laughter, hard evil laughter.

“Sorry Auditor, I warned you,” Adam tries to pull the

blade, It goes up an inch, then again, then once more.

“Try to pull it out. You’ll only end up like Aries”

Auditor Preflux says in a nonchalant attitude.

The blade raised another inch, until he pulled out the blade. A voice talks to him in the distance.

Raise the sword skyward, then strike.

Adam quickly raised the sword skyward, the sword charged up, into a colorful blade so bright even if you don’t look at it, it burns.

“What?! How?!” Auditor Preflux says aggravated. The voice comes back to talk to Adam.

Master Adam, I prefer you strike him.

“What? Who are you?” Adam questions.

Master, I really don’t think now is the time for that.

Just then the Auditor latched onto Adam.

“GET UP!” Brody cheers on Adam.

“YEA, GO GET HIM!” Mary chimes in. He knocks off the Auditor, and slashes him with the blade.

“GAH, I can’t fight you in this current state. I gotta go,” Auditor Preflux says in fear.

...

“Oh, no,” Aries says disappointedly. “They’re depending on me, what should I do?”

Suddenly, a figure appears out of nowhere.

“Tev ebiil, f jrpq klq pmbxh jv kxjb.” The figure says.

“Oh, it's you,” Aries says. “Fine.”

“F zxx dbq vlr lrq lc ebob, yrq tb exsb ql al x abxi”

The figure says.

“Really?” Aries says skeptically.

...

Master Adam, I prefer you try to train with the sword so you can grow stronger.

The voice speaks once more.

“Okay... Wait– Who are you?”

My name is Illy. Your spirit guidance.

“Well, thanks... I guess. Illy, meet Mary, Brody.”

“Hi,” Brody introduces himself.

“Greetings,” Mary adds.

Hello to you all. Master, I must inform you a strong Aura is found nearby. Something... familiar.

“Okay! Uhhhh– But how?” Adam asks.

Point the sword anywhere. The brighter it burns, the more Aura is detected.

Then Illy fades into a small sphere and goes into the universe blade.

“Okay! Follow me!” Adam says courageously. He pointed the sword in the *North Eastern* way, the sword was burning bright and they started to follow it. They pass by a mysterious cube. Adam looks left and right, but nobody knows what it is. Illy comes out to assist them.

Yes, I know what this is... It's a cube from a goddess, for The Chosen One. Master Adam, raise the sword skyward and slash.

So he slashes the cube with a *Skyward strike* and it glows. A note falls out from seemingly nowhere after the strike. It reads...

```
- .... . / -.-. .... -- ... . -. / -- -. .
/ -. ..- .. -.. . -.. / ..-. .-. -- - /
.-.. .. -. .... - -.- / - ..- ... - / ...
. . -.- / .- / -.- ..- . ... - / -. -- - /
... -- / -... .-. .. -. .... - -.- / -...
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.-. .- ...- -.- .-.. -- / - -- -... -.-. ..
.-. ..- / - ..-. .. .. / -.- -... / -.-
-.-.- -.. .... .-.-.-
```

It's in a weird and unfamiliar code.

"Illy, do you know anything about this?" Mary asks.

Yes, it's written from one of our goddesses, but it will take time to decipher.

“Okay!” Adam says.

Master Adam, please point the sword somewhere different, I don't sense more Aura.

Adam points the sword in the *South Eastern* direction. Nothing happened.

...

30 minutes later...

Master, I have decoded the cipher.

“Really? Tell me!

Okay.

*THE CHOSEN ONE GUIDED FROM LIGHT, MUST SEEK
A QUEST NOT SO BRIGHT, BUT BE AWARE YOU
MUST FIGHT. BUT TAKE CAUTION, YOU MUST FACE
THE SACRED DEVIL.*

{ XRAFQLO MOBCIRU TFII YB YXZH }

“What... What does that mean?” Adam questions

I think it means you must fight the Auditor, but first you must train.

“Alright.” Adam says, Adam starts training. Hitting the vast walls of the empty corridors. Adam heads back to the shack to train, going into Aries warp once again to head back to his own dimension. He walks back to Aries' study, he looks at the painting of Aries and Auditor, it reminded him of Aries, He

slashes the painting in half. “I won’t let you destroy my world, I won’t.”

Adam raises the sword skyward then hits a pillar.

“Woah, Adam. You really need to calm down, don’t you think?”

Mary comforts.

“GET AWAY. ARIES IS GONE, HE WAS OUR ONLY CHANCE OF HELP, NOW LOOK AT THIS. HE’S GONE, I WON’T LET AUDITOR DESTROY THIS WORLD.” Adam says furiously.

Master Adam, I must ask you to calm down. Your heart rate increased by 60%. If you go any further you will go into an emotional rage, and possibly make relationships unstable.

“SHUT UP ILLY, AND MIGHT AS WELL LEAVE IT LIKE THAT,” Adam screams. He stomps out of the room.

XI

TORN WIRES

Adam starts running away from the shack to start a new life, Brody and Mary chase after him, but it was too late, he was gone.

Brody and Mary look at each other. “He changed after he took that sword. I think it’s making him crazy,” Brody noted.

“Wait!” Mary takes out a piece of paper from her pocket. It’s a schematic she stole from the Auditor's Lab.

“Destroyer Concept 1. THAT’S IT!” Brody realizes it is the Improbability Destroyer.

...

Master, I want you to turn back. If you go any further you mig-

“Shut up Illy, what do you know-” Adam feels something coursing through his veins “What the-” Adam suddenly faints.

“I knew that would do the trick, it wasn't the sword that made you crazy, it was yourself. And maybe a bit me” The voice says, Adam cannot see who it is, it is a blur. He snaps out of it and realizes it’s the Auditor. He reaches into a drawer, big enough to hold a person in there. He realizes that it is the goo.

“Don’t worry. This won’t be long. Masterpiece.”

...

Brody and Mary run back to the shack. “What should we do?” Brody asks. “We know what we need, just how would we get it back?”

“We need to find a way to get to the old laboratory in Arena Tower.” The ground rumbles once more. “We need to do it fast, everyone is panicking. The Rifts... Well, I don’t know. But the universe is starting to tear apart.”

Brody recalls the fateful hallway where he broke the Improbability Destroyer. A hallway, at the top of the tower, painted in a color that reminds him of coffee. That’s a long while back, now.

The rumbling breaks his train of thought. “Let’s go, NOW!” Brody urges.

...

“So, if I just do that, I’m out of here?” Aries asks the figure.

“Vbp. Yrq ifpqbk ql jb zxobcriiv, qefp fp sbov ofphv clo ylqe lc rp.”

“Hm.” Aries thinks for a second. “Sure.”

...

Adam wakes up in a familiar place. Familiar tubes, familiar room, familiar facility. It reminds him of the Body Storage Room, but it is not. It’s another laboratory.

“WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?!” Adam screams

into a wall. There's no response.

A few minutes later, a button appears upon a wall. A screeching, piercing feedback sound rips Adam's ears apart, but then a familiar voice comes up. ***"Hello, Adam. How are you?"***

"Obviously NOT fine." Adam rolls his eyes and shakes his head in disappointment. As he looks over he realizes something is missing. The sword.

"I've noticed that you noticed that I have the sword, and you don't. Boo hoo. But, I'll give you a deal. If you press the button on the wall, you get your sword back. Alright?"

"But what does the button do?"

"That's irrelevant. Just press it."

Adam walks toward the button. He puts his finger up. Then down. Then up again. "If I press this button, can I go?"

"Yes."

Adam sees no way out. He places his finger on the button, and slowly depresses it, with hands, legs, feet, everything is shaking.

...

Brody and Mary stand before the tall shard of glass that is Arena Tower.

"Are you sure it's in here?" Mary asks.

"For certain," Brody says confidently.

The door slides open, and they are welcomed into the new facility. But Brody notices something odd. There are no goons to greet him, the paint on the wall is peeling, and some of

the lights are out.

Brody looks at Mary, and Mary looks at the desolate walls and floors. “I think we’re too late,” Mary adds.

“It’s not *too* late. It’s probably still here.”

They walk up the steps, with the floorboards creaking, and the draft blowing from a distance, seemingly shaking the building to them. The taps on the steps echo as they walk up the dark staircase leading to the apex of Arena Tower. As they walk up, a door can be seen from a distance.

“That wasn’t there before,” Brody says.

Their stride stops. “Just open it. It’s been a long time anyway.”

They make their way to the door.

The Karaoke Bar is closed on Tuesdays, come back tomorrow at 6PM for the next show.

Brody and Mary take a peek inside, just stools and microphones that remain empty.

“Let’s go. We’re wasting time.”

They head upstairs once more, now at the top of the building. As they open the dusty door, the walls vibrate as the blowing of the wind brushes on Arena Tower. Yet, they see nothing but shattered glass panes and demolished walls. Brody notices, however, a book that is covered in shards and slightly dilapidated. A book he instantly remembers. *Ava Auditor*. Adam

picks up the book and opens it.

XII**AVA'S JOURNAL**

2/17/2002 Ava Auditor

My grandson has gone crazy with my research. All my books that I spent so much time on, gone, all his now. I would have stopped him, but he's my grandson. Ever since my daughter...

I don't know what to do. Should I depart from my house in the old countryside and tell someone? Or should I stay here and wait? He'll go insane either way. I don't want him to turn away, but if I even try to come to him, he turns away again.

I have one last book. One that I shall cherish forever.

3/21/2002 Ava Auditor

Where is he? Where is my grandson?! I've looked in his labs, his offices, but he's nowhere. Like it's abandoned.

I've heard rumors. Terrible and horrible rumors. But something in me feels like they could be true. A person turned into a weird figure, and started to go on a rampage in multiple cities. I am unsure, but I am worried about my son.

Where is my grandson?

4/24/2002 Ava Auditor

Splitting headache all the time. Everything is cloudy. Vision is blurred. Leg skin turning dark or rotting. Help needed.

FOR POSTAGE 10 CENTS

7123 Careforest Boulevard

Harrison City, State Area, 1291

5/1/2002 Ava Auditor

Where is my grandson? All around, people are scared for their lives. People think that the Rifts are starting. The scientists are afraid too. And I think this is all connected with my

***VLRO DOXKAPLK FP PXC B TFQE JB. AL
KLQ YB XCOXFA. BSBVQEFKD TFII JXHB PBKPB
PLLK.***

5/26/2002 Ava Auditor

Grandson came today. He had such a calm and pleasant voice, so false. He might as well take part in acting in a farce. He was not the same as he had been. Even through my blurred vision, his eyes turned distinctly dark. Unlike the pale eyes everyone has in the family.

1/1/2003 Ava Auditor

It's been awhile since I wrote in this journal. But it has officially been one year. I'm very worried about my grandson. Liam is it? It's been so long I've almost forgotten his name, and yet he never gave me a passing glance. I'm very worried about my Liam. Poor Liam, what happened to you? And yet he never talks to me. His behavior has changed ever since he read those *hieroglyphics*.

2/5/2003 Ava Auditor.

How long will it take for my grandson to come back? My true grandson, the one that I've known for, god knows how long. I can't enumerate the days it has been since his departure. Now, he has been doing these weird experiments on me. I'm very scared. Samuel is one weird boy. Wait, Samuel? It's not that... What's his name?

?/??/???? Ava...

What's going on? It's an unfamiliar place. Where am I? Who am I? What day is it? The 31st of February. What's going on? I'm in immense pain, but yet my grandson. Somewhere he is out there, seeking for an escape. ~~He is in there, just lost, trapped~~ in a shell which once ~~was him, now~~ taken over by

??/??/??? ????????

Texq'p dlfdk lk fk qefp tloia. Klqefkd pbbjp qeb pxjb.
Qfjb fp pmbbafkd rm. bka lc qeb tloia fp zljfdk. Zxixjfqv fqpbic.
F alk'q bsbk hklt tel f xj. Telbsbo'p obxafkd qefp. Mibxpb ebim
jb.

??/??/?? ????????

F pbb dobxqbo ixkap, cxoqebo qexk qeb bvb zxk pbb.
Lkb axv, f qefkh, qexq eb'ii xmmbxo qebob. Yrq eb fp klq
qebob. Xka eb fp klq fk efp ltk ylav. Fq fp x cxzxab, fq fp klq jv
doxkaplk. Jv doxkaplk txp x crkkv xka zxofkd ixa. Klt eb fp
grpq x ifxo. F cbxo clo qljlloolt. Xka klt f xj xcoxfa qexq f tfii klq
yb xyi

All Brody and Mary see on the next page are words,
desperately etched into the thin paper.

cxobtbii doxkaplk

“What does this all mean?” Brody asks.

“I have no clue.”

“Hey, I can take that for you,” a person says right behind
them.

“Oh, hi,” Mary greets, surprised. She reads the nametag,

DEMOLITION SERVICES INC. Cooper Anderson. “Nice to see you, Cooper.”

“Nice to see you too.” Mary tears the written notes out of the journal, and hands the rest to Cooper. “What are you here for, anyways? You’re not in trouble, just asking. People always come up here thinking that this is the karaoke bar.”

“We’re just exploring. Why is it being demolished?”

“The property owner wanted the building gone because he got a new area. Hopefully he didn’t forget anything.”

Mary looks at Brody, immediately concerned. They remembered that Adam is still missing.

“We need to go. Sorry, but it was nice meeting you.”

...

A loud buzz fills the room, echoing in the dull walls. “What was that?”

A new, robotic voice announces, “Testing initiated.”

Robotic arms lift him up in the air. Another arm is equipped with a tiny, sharp needle. It’s filled with a familiar liquid. The corruption goo.

“You seem to be frightened,” Auditor Prefix notices, “but don’t worry. Just hang still and my new technology will do the rest.”

Adam tries to wiggle his way out of the tight cuffs of the arms, but to no avail, he can’t escape. The injection stung Adam’s upper arm, injecting itself into his system.

...

Brody and Mary encounter a hallway, still lit and left untouched. The lights flicker again, but Brody remembers.

“It was here where I fought the Auditor. Right in this corridor. So many months ago.”

Mary and Brody hunt for the remains of the Improbability Destroyer. Walking into the many different rooms, Mary notices something shimmering in her eyes. “Look what I found!”

Brody runs over, and stops. He looks over at the shattered pieces of machinery inside the Improbability Destroyer. “Once it broke, all hell broke loose with it too. And I was too ignorant to notice.”

“How are we going to repair it?”

“You have the blueprints, right?”

“I don’t know how to read it though. I can try, but my knowledge is only elementary level.”

“We need Aries. But he’s not here anymore.”

“Hopefully he comes back. He always returns.”

An apparition, a familiar image, an image of a person flashes in their eyes, just for a split second. They cannot identify the person in time, but it’s awfully familiar to Brody and Mary.

“Who was that?!” Brody looks over to Mary, also startled by the flashes.

“I... don’t know.”

“Alright, just grab the thing and go. We’re wasting time.”

They dash out of the hallway and bid farewell to Cooper Anderson and Arena Tower. With the shards of the Improbability Destroyer and the pages of Ava's journal, they notice something from a particular shard.

"That shard... it's burning in the sun," Brody notices.

"But the shimmering, it's away from the sun."

"WAIT! Give the shard to me."

A voice whispers into their ears.

*Follow the shimmering of the shard,
and you will find who you are looking for.*

"It's the voice of Illy."

"Well, tell me!" Mary says arrogantly.

"Follow the shimmering of the shard, and you will find who you are looking for."

Mary gently takes the shard in his hands and spins around trying to find the direction of the shimmer. She finally stops in a particular direction, one where the shimmering is so bright, it blinds. "It's this way."

XIII

FALSE FRIEND

Adam wakes up seeing these weird, slimy, corrupted versions of Brody, Mary, and Aries.

“AH, WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS?” Adam asks in fear.

The Auditor chuckles. ***“Ha ha ha. Don’t worry, those are what I call ‘Hollows’”***

“What?! But-bu-” Adam gets interrupted by Auditor

“Sure, they ain’t your real friends, but they are made with the pure evil of my source. Made purely with corruption. Just wait till they merge with your real friends, heh heh heh.”

Auditor says.

“What was that?” Adam asks.

“Ahem. Nothing! Ugh, how can he hear that?” Auditor says frustrated.

“I can hear everything, just from the rustling sound I hear... You’re scratching your butt!” Adam exclaims.

“Soon you won’t hear anything, only you listening to my command,” Auditor says. He takes a batch of corruption goo out and takes a syringe.

“AH! NO NO NOOOO!” Adam screams in terror.

“Don’t worry, the pain will go away. HA HA HA HA.”

...

Brody and Mary walk down a street alleyway, following the shard still shining brightly in the sunset. But the apparition returns, and before them they see a shadowy figure.

“Who are you?” Mary asks. The shadow figure runs into a busy street looking for ways to go.

“Wait.. That helmet, IS THAT ARIES?!” Brody suspects. “HEY, GET BACK HERE!” Eventually they run into a dead end. The shadowy figure turns around only for Brody and Mary to see hollow Aries.

“Ha, There’s no turning back, TIME TO DIE!” Hollow Aries screams, but then suddenly a real Aries pops up to deal a fatal sucker punch.

“What the- Aries?! How’d you-” Brody asks.

“No time to explain, RUN!”

Brody looks at Mary, slightly hesitant, but Aries tugs on their hands and pulls them in like a fishing rod, saving them from the other figure. It turns, dashing after them once more. They try to outrun it, but it never runs slower than them. They turn the next street over, ignoring the stoplights and hopping over cars on the way, but the Hollow still follows.

“We need to get back to the shed,” Aries lets out, obviously worn out. “That’s where you will be most protected.”

“But... but Adam!” Mary cries.

“We can’t get there safely. The protection forcefield is what we need.”

They turn the bend, running as fast as their feet can take them. Swinging from side to side as cars approach in fury, the asphalt road is all they see ahead. Their heads swing from one side to another, tracking the Hollow chase after them too.

“You’ll never escape me! Ha ha ha!”

As they run for miles, they grow tired, but they see the shack in front of them. Their legs hop again, again, again on the never ending road, almost tripping on the piles of dog droppings on the sidewalk, but, alas, they reach the shack.

“TURN ON THE FORCEFIELD!” Brody yells in fear.

“I’M TRYING!” Aries yells back, pressing the red *ON* button. The force field activates, turning on and shocking the Hollow as it winces in pain and runs away. **“I will get you soon! I SHALL FIND YOU ONCE MORE!”** It then fades away, nowhere to be seen.

They all let out a sigh of relief.

“Aries,” Adam asks, “why... where... How were you able to come back? I thought you were trapped in... the Loop Realm.”

“I know you guys are confused. But someone was up there, someone I knew. Her name was Ava.”

“Ava... Ava... AVA!” Mary takes out the pages of the journal. “Could this be it?”

“WAIT, could it be? Do my eyes deceive me? It's her journal! Man, back in the old days we were great friends, being reckless, climbing trees, exploring small tunnels together, this

brings me back,” Aries reminisces, a tear drips down his face. “That was before the Auditor read those... those *books*. I thought I could trust him, but now here we are.”

“I’m sorry, Aries. But I was the one who made this situation worse, honestly. I was the one who let out his true power,” Brody explains. “But I had no choice, my father is somewhere, waiting for us. But we need to find Adam first.”

“Okay, so we need to find Adam. But he’s with the Auditor, I’m sure he’s corrupting him as we speak.” Mary claims. Suddenly, Adam appears in the corner of her eye, around the shack’s forcefield.

“reverof ereh yats t’nac uoY,” Corrupted Adam phrases.

“Adam, please it’s me! Not again.”

“.esoprup eurt ym dnuof ev’I .uoy deen t’nod I ,yltsenoH,”

Brody looks around, Aries and Mary right next to him, watching and listening. Aries mutters to Brody, “The Elevator. Now. I can fix it.”

Brody looks at Corrupted Adam, his face hazy. Brody steps back, and takes another. Then, he turns around and tries to run, but Adam clinches his shoulder, saying, **“.gninrael neeb ev’I tahw ees ot denethgilne eb lliw uoY !ydorB no emoC”**

Brody pries Adam’s hands out of his shoulder, but his hands still cling on to his arms. “Do you know who I even am?!” Brody cries. His head swings back to Aries and Mary. “Just go

down. I'll take care of this."

They nod in agreement and run to the underground study. Brody exerts his arm out, pushing Adam away. "You're not the cousin I know," he adds. "GET OUT. NOW!" Brody turns, picking up his leg and swinging it furiously at Adam, an angry roundhouse kick to his torso, and Brody runs away to the study. Adam chases after him, the kick not affecting him at all. Brody swings open the door, dashing towards the elevator, and slams the door behind him. He calls the elevator, repeatedly slapping the button as fast as he possibly can, as if that would make the elevator go faster. Adam's chase slowed to a menacing stomp; as Brody feared for his life, the elevator doors finally opened, the cheerfully ringing bell oblivious to the mayhem occurring.

Adam hears the ringing and dashes toward the elevator. **“su htiw hcum os nrael lliw uoY .kcab emoc ,ydorB”** Brody doesn't trust him. He knows he has been corrupted.

The doors shut slowly. Adam leaps towards the elevator doors, but, fortunately, they close just in time, leaving Adam with a bruised head, and a sigh of relief from Brody. The elevator heads down.

...

"Those glistening shards, they are shavings of the Universe Blade," Aries explains, "that's how Brody was able to kill the Boss. Cracking the shard unleashes unrelenting power. But, since it made universes unstable, the Auditor leaped in and

took his form. He was controlling him, and now since he was killed, his true form came about.”

“I can try to prepare another use,” Aries continues. “But it will be risky. It is unknown what it can really do.”

The bells ring. Aries and Mary flinch, but it is Brody who comes out the doors.

“Woah there, don’t just come in here unannounced, you scared us!” Aries exclaimed.

Brody, hyperventilating, let out a sigh. “We need to stay here. But we don’t have much time.”

“Why?”

“Auditor Preflux will be here any moment. He will try to corrupt you, his new corruption formula is very powerful.”

“Alright,” Aries says. “We need a bunch of materials to stitch the Destroyer back together. If only I had the blueprint.”

“Oh,” Mary says. “I have the blueprint on me, Aries.” She hands the blueprint over.

“Great!”

As Aries turns over to his desk, his papers topple over, and the lights begin to flicker. Crackling and thumping are all they hear above them as all the papers fly like birds over them, Brody stumbles to the ground as it shakes, tripping Mary in the process. Aries’s chair topples over, and all he sees is the glistening of the shards before him.

The lights flicker to a silent black, and the rumbling fades. It’s as dark as midnight in Aries’s study. Mary and Brody

pick themselves up and begin touching the bookshelves and feeling around the tables and walls, seeking for a flashlight. *Not again*, they thought. However, before they find one, a voice speaks to them from the dark abyss.

“I’ve got you cornered now! How do you feel, my friends?”

“What do you think?” Aries yells back.

“Anyways, it’s about time that I teach you about the New Plan.”

“It must be fun,” Brody jokes.

“Well, it will be. Once you follow me.”

“I will never follow you!” Mary yells. “You are pure evil. Nobody will follow you even if you try.”

“Ho, ho, ho,” he chuckles, ***“you really think that. Well, I think it’s about time for you to JOIN YOUR FRIEND!”***

Auditor Preflux sprays his new solution of corruption onto them. Aries, Brody, and Mary scream for their lives, but nobody hears them in the underground study. Their screaming fades to silence as the corruption spreads onto them. Their vision blurs, a splitting headache resides. The little of what they saw disappears.

XIV

FACILITY IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

Flashes of familiar images force themselves upon their eyes. What Aries sees is inexplicable, indescribable. Adam, Brody, and Mary are there, the injection splitting their skin apart, tearing the room into an endless and dark abyss. The color of the sky begins to crumble into pieces; threads of purple and black become the only things there. He tries to scream, but whatever he tries to do, nothing happens. And before he can catch a glimpse of the rest of the room, his vision soon blurs and fades to black.

...

Brody squints over in the distance. He sees Aries there, being dragged away by the Weathermen. He turns around, his eyes wide open once he sees the walls seemingly float away like gravity isn't a thing anymore. He turns around, Aries trying to scream something, but nothing can be heard.

"ARIES!" Brody screams over, echoing nowhere. But the ground crumbles before he could run over, and he tips over the edge, suffocating in the dark, no one to save him.

...

Mary looks down at the broken ground, seeing Brody falling into an endless void. She looks up, the darkness looming over them as the corruption spreads. She can barely make out the silhouette

of Aries fading away. She sits down on the falling ground, legs bent as she accepts her fate, letting the void take over. She sheds a tear as she shuts her eyes, not knowing what would come.

...

All of them wake up at the same familiar-yet-different place.

“Welcome!” the loudspeaker blasts in the room. **“Say your goodbyes everyone, this will be the last time you see each other.”** The Auditor lets out a chuckle.

All they can do is stare at each other, unable to speak, barely recognising each other. All of them come closer, reaching out their hands to each other for one final time. They place their hands on each others’ lifeless shoulders as they close their eyes, shaking their heads in disappointment.

...

“Hey,” a familiar voice calls out to Aries.

“Hm?” Aries can’t make out who he is.

“You need to listen. Auditor Preflux is making his own Improbability Destroyer to corrupt the whole world. You need to take it from him in a hurry. Everyone will die with the power in his hands?”

“But... I remember Brody telling me that once he destroyed it, it let out his true power.”

“There is a thing about the Auditor that I haven’t told you yet,” he responds. “And the system of universes. If you release the Destroyer in this state, it will unleash a magnitude of power that is unheard of. You are the only one I know that can

handle this risk.”

“What do I do then?”

“You have to do it, there’s no other choice. But I’m warning you. And I will try to guide you out of his facility. But Adam, Brody, and Mary are fully corrupted. They will try to catch you. But it is nearing dawn, and I must make myself hidden. But I will tell you now: the key is located in the box—”

The voice cuts out as Aries wakes up. He hears Auditor Preflux’s voice take over. ***“You, my friend, we need to talk. Find me in room 100.”***

Aries looks left, then right. He gets up, and walks up to the door, sliding open and granting him access to the main hall. He peers over on the other side of the door. *Room 1798*. He realizes he’s many floors up. Or down. There’s no windows. He looks ahead, it’s vastly empty. He walks forward, the tapping echoing, repeating itself back into his ears.

He keeps walking, and as he continues a loud *THUD* makes itself heard as the light ahead of him lights up, the one behind him shutting off.

“Is... anyone there?” he asks. The silence, he understood, meant that the answer is an obvious *no*.

As he keeps walking, the diamond-plated sheets of metal, he notices, doesn’t have its clean pattern, it’s covered in dust that might have been a century old.

1772. The signs count down like clockwork. 1769. Each sign has a name on it. 1753. *Charlotte Meyers. Ivan*

Cardinal. Nick Trixie. 1737. He stops his stride, standing completely still, listening for any breath let out in one of these rooms, listening for any life. *1721.* Listening intently for any person to speak to him. Perhaps Adam. Or Brody and Mary. But there is nobody there.

1700. A button, a door, an elevator. He presses it, the clicking echoing to the other side of the hall. *Bing!* A bell chimes in and welcomes Aries into the elevator. As he walks in, his nose picks up on a terrible, awful stench. The elevator cabin... It reeks of skunk cabbage doused in socks worn for three months. Nevertheless, he clicks the exceedingly large **1** button screaming at him.

He gets down to the lower level, the lights shutting on with the same loud *THUD*. But in the far darkness he sees a door ajar. *Room 100.* He runs, not wanting to anger the Auditor with his... impatience.

“Hello, Aries,” the Auditor greets. Aries doesn’t respond. ***“Ah. Well, then. How are you? How’s your day going?”***

“Shut up. You know already.”

“Oh really?” the Auditor laughs. ***“After all this time I’ve gone out of my way to help you. We could have been the next Issac Newton. Scientific discoverers, we would have been world-famous. But instead you turn against me, because ‘my ideals are not very optimistic.’ Yet look at you now. Inferior. I’ve made many technological and scientific achievements.***

And you? All you do is sit around with your friends that really are just yourse--.

“That fame means nothing. Do you really think that you’re helping? You’re causing the Rifts. You killed many... even my precious Ava. How do you feel?”

“The Rifts are not my fault. I’m trying to save people. I should really be labeled as a hero! The ‘corruption’ as you call it is my quick and easy way so people don’t feel pain.”

“But what about Ava? Your grandmother... You killed her! Excuses, excuses, you make up on the spot. You’ve never changed. You idiot! Why did you have to experiment on her? Her frail, old body was made worse by who else?”

“She’s in a better place now. She would’ve been killed either way... Harrison City is over.”

“What do you mean by over?”

“The Rifts killed them all.”

“But...”

“Do you realize your fallacy here? If you never got in MY way, I could have saved them! But you... you deserve this. After you sabotaged MY career, MY plans, MY FUTURE.”

“How did I know the Rifts were going to kill them?! I thought YOU were going to kill them. YOU were the one to open the Timeway.”

“I was revolutionizing the way we know the universe. I had the tools to save them. But YOU and your PESKY LITTLE FRIENDS got in the way. Why? Because they were going to

destroy EVERYONE with the Improbability Destroyer. I had to intervene. Then YOU showed up and thought I was the enemy?!" The Auditor turns his attention to the hallway. ***"TAKE HIM AWAY. NOW!"***

Just then, Aries sees Adam, Brody, and Mary beyond the dark hall, their corrupted minds after him. Him. *HIM!* Suddenly he blacks out, unaware of everything, until he wakes up holding Mary by the collar of her shirt while all of them are knocked out.

"What the?! What happened?" Aries asks himself.

"I happened," the familiar voice says. *"Do you remember me? All of the time we spent together?"*

"What? Who are you?" Aries asks.

"It's me! Please tell me you remember! It's me! Alan! Your corruption!" Aries corruption states.

"My god... It's been so long since I talked to you," Suddenly Auditor Preflux comes in behind them, and tries to attack him as Aries falls to the ground, "FRICK. I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die" Aries repeats to himself,

"I can assure you, you will not die," The corruption says, *"Just give me control for a while."*

"Oh-Ok," Aries stutters, as the corruption takes over him, *"Ah yeah- I'm back!"* Corrupted Aries exclaims.

"Impressive, but let's see how you go against me. My creation against me. ME." Auditor Preflux says with a soft grin. Corrupted Aries lunges at him, throwing out a punch at him, then getting him in a chokehold, making him flee into his office, as

Aries takes control back of his body.

XV

THE END OF HARRISON

“Run.”

“Now?”

“NOW!”

Aries hesitates, looks left before his legs prompt him to go. He steps once and once more, then his legs start flying on the floor.

“Oh, you’re not going anywhere, kid.”

Just then, a hefty sliding door slams itself shut, a slam so immense it shook Aries down to the ground. As he stumbles, he looks over at the Auditor. He realizes he’s right for once. Aries is inferior. He looks up at the Auditor, so tall and wide. His devilish stare. His broad shoulders. His dark silhouette he only sees. All above him. And he cannot do anything about it.

But he notices that something is... glowing. Right behind the outline of the Auditor.

“I sense something... is coming... in the building,”
Aries’ corruption states.

“It might be.”

“Hell, make a run for it.”

“What?”

“Go NOW! This might as well be the only way.”

Aries picks himself up and turns. He runs straight toward the Auditor, his legs flying and swinging as fast as he humanly can. The Auditor flinches before he tries swinging a punch. Aries slides under his legs, swooping back up. He brings his legs up like he did in the olden days, those play fights. But this time it is for real. He lets out a fatal kick to the crotch, the recoil causing a massive ripple throughout the facility before Aries finally runs toward the faint glow.

“What the...” a familiar voice mutters. Aries knows the familiar voice. Auddie. But he did not see him before he jumped into the portal.

And that’s all he remembers.

...

He wakes up faint, the light of the sun shines onto his face as he tries waking up. But as soon as he sees, smells, hears flames, his eyes become wide as a fish.

He sees before him devastation. Shards of glass on the ground. Wood burning, sparkling, kindling. Bricks scattered like ants in a colony. It smells like a barbeque, but there’s no meat to be cooked. Only bricks.

Aries looks back down to the remnants of a sprawling city. A note is left for him on the ground.

8/19/22

*Sometimes havoc strikes
After all seems fine
You can never expect it
But it's as sudden as a line.*

*A rift opens up
A massive, gaping hole
Going to suck everyone
And buildings, full and whole.*

*It seems like the end
But that can't be close to true
On the other side of the hole
It seems nice and people are few.*

*Harrison City, it was
It shall be ingrained in my mind
But sooner or later, it seems
That I must leave it behind.*

*For catastrophe is only
Means for a new life
Never mind the troubles
Oh, the heartrending strife.*

*And for all of you seeing this
Note left before I fly
It seems the gods and goddesses
Have left our city to die.*

*But that is alright.
It was never their fault.*

“So it was true.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“It was bound to happen,” Aries explains, “but I never thought it would be this soon. The Auditor made everything unstable. Auddie seems to be the only survivor. It’s all just rubble.

“They’re still alive somewhere. But the Rifts took them to a place I don’t know where. And my laboratories, my research, it’s all buried in the... bricks I used to call home. I can’t go anywhere. Not until I find a way out. And everyone I knew, even Sarah from the coffee shop downtown, or Katrina, my consultant. They’re there somewhere. Just not here.”

Aries looks up. The moonlight shows itself rising, the shards of glass crunching in the flames of the used-to-be wooden houses, now just black, dirty dust. He sees only one building standing off in the far distance. Picking up a stick and lighting it

up from one of the kindling fires, he makes his way through the winding road to the building. *Careforest*, he remembers, the forest named after the caring wolves of the city in 1892. But the trees have been stripped of their caring greens, wildlife already gone, afraid of the realm outside of their own.

Auditor 7123. He recognizes the sign from yards away. The one that brought him joy for plenty of his childhood. But seeing the sign only brought him sorrow. Lifeless, the house stands there, only a corpse of its former self.

He notices the newspaper, slightly burnt after the wildfires.

BREAKING: RIFTS ABOUT TO END CITY, CITY SCIENTIST BUREAU STATES IN NEW REPORT

He looks on the reverse side, a hand-written note.

8/30/22

Sometimes you can't escape it.

Sometimes you have to give in.

But many times

It seems

like

there might be a way.

This time, there is no way out.

This time, all efforts will fail.

*It is the end
of
all of our dear lives.*

Did we ever deserve this?

*No.
But we have to go
through
it together.*

*Perhaps there is
something
on the other side.*

“Perhaps there is something on the other side,” Aries repeats. “Perhaps. Perhaps. Perhaps.”

“*Perhaps.*”

“Perhaps.”

Aries walks over to the old lake. He only sees driftwood and trees barely holding themselves up. Stripped of their bark, there’s none of the familiar etches of love stories that are probably not holding up to this day.

He goes back on the road. Nothing is left for him. All of his prized possessions are burnt to a crisp. Nothing. He finds his old bicycle, hoping that it will still work in the rusted state it is

in. He gets on, but all in an instant it crumbles to the ground in pieces. As he gets himself back up, he sees something carved on a small section of a wall.

**Meet me at the remains of Harrison City, remember? The one you have? The one you owned? Or the one you had.
Coordinates: -127, 15, -236".**

“The one I *had*? What is he talking about?” His memory is still hazy after waking up, but he has no choice. “I’m already in Harrison City.” He goes to the coordinates, right by his old laboratory. He recognizes his old helmet prototypes, covered in a mixture of dust and ash. He looks behind him, and is surprised to see Auditor Preflux holding Auddie. “HOLY CRAP OF NATHANIEL! WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU DOING?!”

“You took everything from me, now I will take everything from you. Remember when we were kids? We were the best of friends, god, damn it we even started our own company when we were 15! But when we made a big profit with our tech you had stupid plans, damn it, we could’ve shared it, shared our GOD DAMN MONEY.”

“I have no idea what you're saying,”

“*Oh you know what I’m saying, dingus*” the Auditor says, his voice loud and stern, “*didn’t you remember? When we*

made a profit, you bought out Harrison City, couldn't believe you forgot it. AND YOU NEVER SHARED WITH ME! So I made an invention to get me my share of profit but it went wrong, and took over me and now here we are! You turned me into a monster, and I might as well act like one. God, damn it, look where we are. Say goodbye to Auddie. The one I gave to you out of spite." Auditor Preflux tugs on Auddie's shirt, and grips on to his head. Time slows for Aries. *My fault? This was back in '06! I even told him! He doesn't know what the heck he's saying.*

"Do you even know what you're saying here? I NEVER DID ANYTHING STUPID! Did you think that what I did was mindless? NO! I thought Harrison City was a good manufacturing spot -- it was *PRIME!* God, damn, YOU are the one doing this to yourself."

Auditor, without a response, twists his hands like he's opening a bottle. Yet, the bottle isn't there. He snaps Auddie's neck.

"NO! AUDDIE!" Aries cries. "GOD DAMN IT, NOOO!"

"Goodbye, Aries. You did this to yourself." Auditor Preflux says, walking away.

Aries screams some more, not at Auditor, but at Auddie. He drops to his knees as does his morale. But it's no use. Auddie is dead. And the Auditor just killed him.

rnsi, tujs dtzw rnsi,

It read.

“WHAT THE?!?!” he said. He looked left, then right, then once he looked back at the paper, the words changed.

PLANS OF: ARIES, GORDAN.

It read.

“I must be drunk after drinking all of that alcohol,” he said weakly. He blinked, and the words changed once again.

**LISTEN TO ME, LISTEN TO ME, LISTEN TO ME,
LISTEN TO ME, LISTEN TO ME, LISTEN TO ME,
LISTEN TO ME, LISTEN TO ME, LISTEN TO ME,
LISTEN TO ME, LISTEN TO ME,**

“Oh god, am I that wasted? I – must – go home -,” Auditor said. He turned around, but as he looked up his vision doubled. In the chaotic dizziness, nothing seemed steady. The floor trembled in his eyes, but it was not.

He collapsed on the floor.

He woke up in his bed, looking at the blank piece of paper on his home-desk. He got a pen and scribbled blindly, aimlessly, clumsily. The pen slashed along the printed ink, faster than a swordsman, trying to cut away at the cursed mess it was. But looking at the mess he made, he realized it was not a mess, but a blueprint.

CORRUPTION FORMULA

“Heh, this can get me my profit back and buy MY half of Harrison City.” Yet, when he left the room, his blueprint faded in scribbles he made.

A few hours later, he returned, only to see the blueprint faded in a fuzzy blue haze.

“No, no, NO!” he yelled. The floor rumbled with him as he ranted on and on. “WHERE’D IT GO?!”

His stomping went on and on, shaking the floor as he was. “MY PLANS!” Auditor screamed.

“Don't worry, you can relax while I do the work,” A mysterious voice spoke to him.

“WHO -- who’s... there?” His voice declined to a whisper.

“That’s unimportant, what is important is that you get to where I need you to.”

“Alright, but what does this have to do with ‘getting my profit back?’”

“Ugh, you’re such a douche. But you won’t be if you just chill, and I’ll do it for you.”

“Alright, when can we start?”

“Now.”

...

Aries knows where he needs to go. The hole... the fire... the Loop Realm. It all lines up.

Yet he can't get there. The only known way is through the sword. But he doesn't have it, let alone Adam. He had to go through alternate means, one that he had to discover himself.

So he goes down to the underground laboratory he once owned, once *had*, running down the ladder one foot at a time. He starts yanking every single document, blueprint, anything that is paper and has information on it. Papers fly like birds, scattering throughout the ash-dusted floor. Every book, every journal, every page. Every single line of text has to be read. Now. Aries has no time to wander. There is work to be done.

...

Aries looks over at his desk and notices the rock in which the Universe Blade rested. He looks inside the crack in which it laid, shining a flashlight into the rectangular hole, and notices a note that was not there before.

It read...

I am afraid to tell you this, but the Auditor is at the brink of destruction of Adam, Brody, and the rest of their Earth. He is using Adam as his puppet. I have tried all that I could to resist, but it was no use. You must return and do something about it. Or else the instability will kill everyone. In all the universes.

“And so he’s back at it again. He honestly has no idea what he’s saying, doing, none of it.”

“I think you should get back there. I know nothing about the Timeway, so you should take the wheel here.”

“You’re right. But he has already proven that he is stronger than us. Nothing can kill him.” Aries says defeated. As Aries leaves the underground laboratory, he notices a haze of purple, almost immediately shooting up into the clouded sky. The Rifts start fusing, creating more strain on the multiverse breaking time, altering reality. He tries to run from the cracks, but they speed up to him, and he trips over. All he can do is look behind him before the Rifts come and snatch him away from his world. Aries falls down into one of the multidimensional cracks and falls through a few certain dimensions, a place of heaven and goddess up in the sky, then to a kid’s bedroom closet, he glares at the kid in his bed watching videos on his tablet. He glares back.

“Who the heck are you?” The kid says.

“Name’s Ari-,” Aries tries to tell him. But, the ground shatters before him, and his descent continues. He was transported to a mysterious maze with yellow, textured wallpaper just like Adam’s house had. His ears picked up a fluorescent light hum-buzz, splitting the silence apart, his mind apart, as his decent slowing chips away at his sanity. He tries to run away from the cracks, and as he runs, he notices a mysterious arrow

pointing to a ladder with a hole. “Where am I?!?!?” He tries running to it, but he stumbles on the ground. Unable to pick himself up, the Rifts continue to shatter, mere inches away from his toes.

He falls in the shattered void once more, passing out before he could once again see the light of day.

...

Aries wakes up in a field beside a distinctly red barn. He hears children laughing, running about and playing a game of tag. Chasing each other, for fun, of course. The winds blow the crops in unison, flowing along the winds aloft. The parents laugh, cheering towards something he cannot hear. The sky is a peachy orange, the sun setting peacefully as the birds whistle a tune. He doesn't know where he is, but all of it seems oddly... familiar.

He looks to his right.

XVII

RUN!

AUDITOR INC. A gigantic sign yells at him.

“Oh, my lordy-lord.”

“*So that’s what he was doing while we were gone.*”

“His own reality. That’s what he wanted from the start. That was Harrison in his mind, his vision. Do you realize what I’m getting at now? His greediness?”

“*You should try going in. See what he has ready for you.*”

“Are you stupid?”

“*Trust me.*”

“If you insist, then fine.”

. . .

Aries opens the metal and glass door, and sees only the Auditor Inc. logo plastered on all four wood-grain walls. He notices the sound, however, of mechanical arms, the ones he used to hear when he visited the factories of technology that Auditor Inc. used to produce, back in Harrison. But this time, he can hear it getting closer, and louder, and more noticeable as time goes on.

Flaps drop down from the wall. His face glimmers from blinding rays made by the evening sundown. It comes down like

a hydraulic press. Who is it?

The Auditor.

“Wow, I can’t believe you came back. Welcome, my friend, to Auditor Inc. How are you doing?”

“You literally stole my company’s name.”

“OUR company’s name. Geez, don’t you remember?”

“I do.”

“Well, welcome to the new Base of Operations. By me, yours, truly. Want to take a looksie? I have an office and room just for you!”

Aries considers his offer. *If I could get into the Body Storage Room, I could save them. But the Auditor is acting way too nice, he was never like this, ever. He is most likely trying to lure me in. But at the same time...*

“Oh trust me, he is luring you in. But, you do you.”

“Heh. Alright, old friend. Show me what you’ve made for us.”

“Glad to have you back on the team, Aries P. Auditor!”

“It’s my pleasure. And sorry about everything, I realize now that buying Harrison was probably the right choice.”

...

The Auditor leads him into Aries’s apartment. ***“Well, it’s nice having you back. See you tomorrow.”***

Aries walks into his room and looks back to the Auditor. He puts up a fake smile, and waves silently back at the Auditor until the door clicks into place and the lock silently engages.

He looks at his room. The bed is pretty large, and the furnishings are all clean. No smudges, not concrete, it's all carpeted and the ceiling is textured like ripples in the ocean waters. Looking around he notices a television, a phone, a desk, plenty of closet space, and a nicely made, sparkling and bright bathroom by the side of the entrance door. It feels like a fancy hotel. But that can't be true. It's AUDITOR CO.

"So, what's your plan here?"

"There's one person I haven't told you about, my friend. Someone that I almost forgot about."

"Who's that?"

"His name is Kai. He's the father of Brody, the first victim of the Auditor's initial attacks on this earth. The Auditor wanted to take it over for his gain of the company. When Brody came back, he did just the same. But when Adam came, that's when I arrived, and the only thing we wanted to do was defeat him. Now we're here, doing none of that. I'm alone, with only you to aid me.

"Him trapping me in the remains of Harrison City was buying him time to build his empire. In a place where nobody knows. At least, that's what I think."

"Now that I'm back, I will buy myself time by faking out his traps. And now that I'm in his little kingdom, I'll find the body storage room and find Kai."

Aries, knowing the plan, confidently turns off the lights and plops himself onto the bed, falling asleep soundly.

...

It's eight in the morning. Or, that's what Aries thinks. He knows not the time in his secluded room of his, where rays nor reflections enter. He looks around, and notices a note from the Auditor on his desk. It reads:

Assistant Duties for Today: Aries P Auditor

- Submit quarterly budget report
- Maintain manufacturing sector 7A and take note of repairs needed
- 12:00 Shift change: Announce the end of group 16A, change to work group 17A.
- Manage janitorial duties for dormitories of work group 17A.

Clipped to the note is a map of the AUDITOR.CO building. Perfect. Aries wastes no time, and hurries down the empty hallways contrasting the top-of-the-line hotel room that he slept in just earlier. He runs to where he knows where the elevators are, while reading the names of all the people who have fallen into the trap that is the Auditor.

“What is an Auditor?” Aries reflects on his very own last name. “A person who evaluates a company's financial honesty? Auditor. He's evaluating not their honesty, but their loyalty. He knows his people in all aspects, and if they're not loyal, they're

not worthy. Thus, he makes them worthy.

“Porter Jones. Alex Houston. Oliver Williams. Abigail Davidson. All of these people were not loyal to the Auditor. So he trapped him in a perpetual state of loyalty, doing everything towards him like a god and its followers. So they will never go against his ideals again.

“Only an Auditor would do that.”

Aries runs for a few minutes, but is halted by the overhead lights switching out of nowhere to a blood-red, telling him to stop right where he is... a stoplight.

“You really thought it’d be that easy. You really fell for that. I had made a much, much more difficult trap ahead after you got through this one. If I would have known that you would fall for that, I would have just put your little special sword on a string.”

“Ah, crap.”

“Well, now that you’re here, let’s do a little game of tag, shall we. Tell you what, if you get to the end, I’ll let one of your friends free, alright?”

“Do you really think you’re going to fool me twice?”

“Fine.”

Sirens suddenly start screaming, and the beacons of their attention-seeking lights begin to flash. Between each blare of the siren he hears a person’s footsteps dash ever closer to him. He looks behind him, and sees Adam out to get him.

“Woah, woah, Adam, we can work this out,” Aries tries

to coax him back to reality, but Adam still dashes toward him.

“Oh, shoot.”

Aries begins to run as fast as possible, sirens detracting him, lights flashing before his eyes. He hears crashing, rumbling, and between the blinding lights, see pillars crashing down as he tries to navigate the pathways of the hallway seemingly getting narrower and narrower as he runs from the enemy he wanted to save.

Each pillar falls, the lights begin to spark, and the hallway seems to get longer each step he takes. Nothing can get him out of this infinite racecourse. Hopping over every pillar he tries to cling on to every valuable breath as he tries to escape. The boxes, chairs, tables, to run from it is to run to it. *Keep running, keep running*, he says to himself.

“You seem to be handling this well. I think I need to pull out the big guns. START THE CRUSHERS!”

“CRUSHER MODE ENGAGED,” an automated voice screeches.

“Crap.”

The ceiling of the room begins to rumble, as hydraulics begin to press down like a stamp to some paper. He runs as fast as he can, hoping he can reach the exit. He looks back, taking one look at Adam, hoping to see him slower than he is, but instead sees his arms and legs extend to the point he is as tall as 8 feet.

His skin turns pitch black as his clothes blend with his

now dark skin.

He looks in front himself once more to only smash in the hard smooth stone of the concrete pillars. “AH! RUN RUN RUN RUN RUNNN!” he screams.

He looks up, the high ceiling slowly coming down at him, and the arms of the new Adam coming down with it. His legs throb in shattering pain, but Aries keeps on running.

Aries doesn’t see it, but Adam is slowly coming at him, reaching for him. Aries squints ahead at the fog of the halls. He sees the faint outline of a door. The elevators. But before he can reach for them, the figure that was Adam picks him up and slams Aries to the ground.

His face shatters as the concrete meets his face in a terrifying demeanor. Squealing in pain, Aries tries to pick himself up, but Adam keeps him down.

“ADAM! PLEASE! I TRIED TO HELP YOU! US!”

“**.gabmucs sselhtroW .tffP ?uoy wonk neve I oD**”

Garbled text leaves Aries with an unsatisfactory result.

Aries shuffles through his pocket, hoping to find a thing that he keeps on him every day. *Where is it... where is it?!* Alas, he finds it. A pocket knife.

“**!?efink tekcop yneew yneet a htiw em taefed uoy dluoc woh ,tffP**” Adam scuffs at him.

“You don’t know what I can do, mister...” Aries says with false confidence. He looks down at his knife, hoping that this blade will knock Adam out of his corruption. “Let’s roll.”

He grips his pocket knife with a firm grasp, and swings it toward Adam, still pinning him down. Even though it went straight through his arm, Adam takes no damage at all. Instead, Adam stares at Aries with a slight grin on his dead face, chuckling at his failure. As Aries releases the knife, the wound instantly heals itself as if nothing happened at all.

“DAMMIT! HOW?” Aries bellows. But before he could complain any longer, he realizes that the Crusher is still coming down, and fiercely it is. Aries, still shaking from the trauma, picks himself up quickly and begins his rush.

“!ris ,em morf gninnur t'nia uoY” Adam continues saying random garbled nonsense.

“What does that mean?!” Aries says under his breath.

The elevators are within his sight, just a few more yards. Losing his breath, he runs as fast as he possibly can, hands reaching for the button. Suddenly, he feels a disgusting wet slimy hand touch him. He tries brushing it off, but it doesn't let go.

“What's THIS?! Or... WHO?”

Looking over to see what it is touching him, he inadvertently runs into the elevator hall. He frantically hunts for the elevator buttons, and spams the first one he sees.

“Come on, hurry! Please!!”

The roof of the Crusher grazes his face.

“Frick.”

“*Say goodbye to your life, Aries. LONG LIVE THE*

AUDITOR!”

“Is that a *Lion King* reference?” Aries asks.

“No... anyways GOODBYE!”

“Are you sure? I’m pretty sure it is a *Lion King* reference. I mean you kept on watching it as a little kid.” Aries says.

“SHUT UP. SHUT UP! SHUT UP!!” Auditor screams, annoyed.

Bing.

Aries, caught off guard, starts crawling to the elevator as the Crusher forces him to go on all fours.

“DARN IT!”

XVIII

DESCENT INTO FIRE

He watches the digits on the numbers descend with the elevator. *Seventy-eight. Seventy-seven. Seventy-six.* Ticking down by the second. His legs feel as if they're floating. The cabin never slows, it seems. Always descending, as if it feels like he's falling into hell.

Sixty-two. Sixty-one. Sixty. He thinks about what could be waiting before him down there. If the Auditor himself would take care of him. Or maybe he'll redirect the elevator to his lair. Or maybe he'll just let him roam free, knowing his obvious plans failed him.

Forty-four. Forty-three. Forty-two. Who knows what would be down there. Perhaps it's nothing and that he's making up things. Or the elevator would get stuck just before the first floor. Or maybe there would be a surprise down there, waiting for him. But now, it just is him. In a box. Falling down faster than he can imagine.

Twenty-six. Twenty-five. Twenty-four. Perhaps the elevator would not slow down at all. It could crash into the ground and nobody would be there to save him. It wouldn't be the heroic death he dreamt for as a child. It wouldn't be a pleasant one. But at least it would be a quick death, if it was hard

enough.

Eleven. Ten. Nine. The elevator approaches its destination. Alas, Aries will get to see what is waiting for him down there. He readies himself, in case somebody is there for him. The elevator slows down, also preparing for what is coming next.

Three.

Two.

One.

Ding!

As the door opens, he tries to walk out, but he is stopped by a voice. An unfamiliar voice. He looks up, thinking it might be a goon, but to his surprise, it's just a random woman.

“Who are you?” Aries asks.

“Who are *you*? And why are *you* here?” she asks.

“I’m here to find the Auditor’s hostages.”

“Lies. LIES! I was the one sent to do that!” She started screaming at him. But before Aries could try to defend himself, he is blasted by a wave of heat.

“Ha! Goon defeated.”

“Ow...”

Aries could not pick himself up.

. . .

Aries gasps for air and shoots himself up off the bed he is lying on.

“Don’t panic now, you’re gonna be fine,” a voice of a

doctor says.

“Ah... how long have I been out?”

“That’s not important. Do you know where you are?”

“The hospital... I think?” he says, squinting his eyes while looking around in his bed.

“Good.”

Aries sighs as he lies back down into his bed.

... *Ten days later* ...

“Congrats on a speedy recovery, Aries. From ‘round here?” the receptionist greets as he walks out of the hospital.

“Let’s just say I’m from far away...”

“Ah. Well best of luck getting back home! The Rifts are getting out of hand.”

“Yeah... see ya!”

“Oh, I hope not!”

They both share a laugh as they part ways. But the receptionist holds his grin for quite a long time.

As Aries goes away, he tries to locate his one and only helmet he brought here. He could still breathe without it; ever since the Rifts opened, all the gasses from all the other earths started mixing together. However, he could barely, as there is much less of the breathable gas in the air.

He couldn’t find it. In fact he forgot where he left it. Or how he was even found. But that is irrelevant to him now. He wants to get back to Auditor Inc, without that silly girl that he

doesn't even know ruining his plans. So, he goes on into the road, not knowing where the building is at all.

He knows it is somewhere in a wheat farm. With a barn. And a lonely road.

"37.253, -115.805" A voice he forgot speaks.

"Huh. Alright, alright. I forgot about you. Wait... where were you during the big ol' chase scene I had with the Auditor?"

"I was guiding somebody else. You wouldn't know them."

"Okay... okay... um, so what's the plan?"

"We go back into the lair, finish up the last person's duty, and get back your people. You like revenge, right?"

"Not really – I mean YES!"

"Well LET'S GO GET SOME!!!"

Shortly after, he opens his online map on his work phone that was provided by the Auditor, enters the coordinates provided by his inner voice... or somebody–

"Wait... why are you helping me? If we go way back, you technically were created by the Auditor."

"Well, he designed all A.I. in his system to be sentient. Wanted to treat his employees like real people. And you were too good to be killed, for long story short."

"That seems like him. Couldn't get enough humans to enslave so he made his own! Haha!"

"At least I didn't fall into his trap. Or else, you'd be dead."

The maps app shows that he is about 27 miles away. Aries sighs the best he could, knowing that he will need to get a car to drive over to the Auditor.

...

“I almost forgot how cars worked in this world,” he whispers under his breath, “Yes, I forgot. I’m stupid. The last time I drove one, I ALMOST DIED.”

The car revs up, and goes away. Unsteadily he steers, with the directions telling him where to go. The Auditor did not make his lair easy to go to, with only back roads and dirt paths leading to it. This is understandable, since he needed to stay under the radar of the authorities. Unfortunately for him, though, Aries has the exact coordinates.

But it is getting late. And as the sun sets, Aries only realizes that the headlights are busted. He decides to head out the car and venture on his own. The rental guy had said to just keep it, as it is an old car from the 80’s and barely runs anymore. So he takes out a flashlight and walks the remainder of the five miles there. It’s a warm night, as it is almost the peak of summer here, wherever it is.

He couldn’t make it out at first, but he could barely see the familiar wheat fields he woke up in days ago. The wheat was starting to be harvested, so some of the wheat had already been cut short. As he approaches, he sees the tall tower of the Auditor. He can imagine him already waiting for Aries.

“Wait... someone’s coming!” a voice Aries heard says.

He stops his movement. He can't make out who is talking, but it certainly is not the Auditor.

"Hide!" another voice says, much quieter than the last. Aries keeps moving, thinking it might be a goon, but then he is noticed.

"ARIES!!!" a voice resembling that of Brody screams excitedly.

"Could it be?" Aries mumbles. He takes a few steps forward, and sees over in the distance Brody, and Mary. The both of them there as if they never were possessed.

"Where have you been?" Brody says. "We've been trying to find you around the complex. Nothing."

"Where -- why -- how are you still alive?!" Aries stutters.

"SHHH!" Brody tries to hush them. "Stay quiet," he whispers, "he's still out there."

"Ok," Aries continues, "but how did you get out of there?"

"So let me explain," Mary says quietly. "This girl that looked a lot like me went in there and got us out of there. I didn't even know her, but she seemed fine. So she broke us out of there, but we've been camping here for a few days now, just to see if you'd come back."

"So now that I'm here, we should go! There's nothing left here, right? I assume you took care of everything right? Where's Adam?"

“Well, you see,” Brody says, “He’s still in there. And I don’t know what the Auditor is doing to him.”

“So can we go back in there and get him?” Aries says, already losing his breath.

“No shot,” a recognizable female voice says, “He’s got soldiers camping around the whole facility now. If we want to get in, we have to outsmart them. Otherwise...”

“Wait...” Aries says. He turns around to see the same woman who knocked him out. “AAHHHHH!”

“Oh. It’s you.”

“Look, I don’t know who you are, but you need to get out or I will take my revenge card.”

“Don’t worry, I’m sorry for all that. They told me all about you. I didn’t know about all of this, and I’m sorry.”

“Oh. Well, alright. Um. Okay, but who are you?”

“The name’s Blaze. I was sent here to defeat the Auditor. And I assume you three are here for that too?”

“Four.”

“Ah, yes. Adam?”

“He’s still stuck in there, and with the key to our victory.”

“The Improbability Destroyer?”

“How do you know?”

“I have my ways.”

“Uh... alright... then. We’ll let’s get out of here.”

“But how?” Mary interrupts.

“I’ve got a car. But it’s like, five miles away.”

“We can make the hike; it’s getting late, and I doubt that the guards will be out this far,” Brody responds.

All four of them go back out through the forest towards the rough direction of Aries’ car. Suddenly, however, Aries’ flashlight begins to emit some strange noises, before it immediately flames up on Aries’ hands.

“ARRGH! Shoot!” Aries’ unconsciously flings the flaming torch out of his hands. But just then they realize that Mary is gone

All of them stare at the burning flashlight, now stuck under a tree.

“IT’S GONNA BURN! ALL OF IT!” All of them scream out in panic, “RUN!”

They all run away, but rapidly the flames engulf the whole forest.

“WAIT!” Blaze screams out hurriedly. “GO BACK! TO THE TOWER! I’VE GOT THIS!”

“I TRUST YOU THEN! GO BACK!” Aries hollers back.

“NO, ALL OF US!” Blaze yells back. As she says this, a huge wave of red pervades the forest. All four of them instinctively run away in different directions.

“GO!” Brody says. “WE’LL BE THERE!” None of them hear anything else from anyone after that.

...

Brody runs deeper into the forest and soon hears Mary's scream. "MARY!!" He calls out, hoping that she would hear him.

"BRODY! WHERE ARE YOU?!" she responds, recognizing the voice but cannot see.

"MARY!" Brody says.

"HELP! PLEASE!" Mary desperately screams out, hoping Brody would come.

"I'M COMING!" Brody hollers over, and tries to run in the direction of the calls.

"HELP HELP HEEEEELP!" Mary screams.

"I SEE YOU!" Brody says. Brody rushes to Mary in desperation "I'M COMING, I'M COMING!" He looks at Mary in a desperate scene, hanging from a tree with her neck tied on a rope. "OH GOD, I GOT YOU," Brody rushes out. Brody quickly breaks off a branch and uses it to cut the rope off. "COME ON, PLEASE DON'T GIVE UP, PLEASE!" Finally the rope snaps and Mary collapses to the ground. "I GOT YOU... I got you," he says, hugging her tightly. But she doesn't respond. Brody slowly pulls Mary's blindfold off, but instead of seeing her light blue eyes, it's black... Pitch black.

"**uoy deloof ,ydorB olleH,**" The now possessed Mary says, in the same distorted voice as before. She puts her hands on his neck, tightening it every second.

"MARY, STOP, PLEASE!" Brody tries to scream, still

shocked and unable to breathe. Suddenly a flame starts, the flame burning the corruption inside of Mary. She falls and lets go of her tight strangle. The flames die down, and Blaze emerges from the woods.

“We need to move,” Blaze says, “We need to find Aries, and get to Adam before it’s too late.” Brody picks up Mary, unconscious but her eyes no longer black. “Hurry!” Blaze stresses.

Brody, with the help of Blaze, carries Mary out of the forest and into the road. After almost an hour of slow, painful walking, they finally spot Aries’ rental car, and Aries is waiting patiently in the car. He gets out and waves them over. “HEY! OVER HERE!”

They go over and lay Mary down on the middle car seat and sit next to her. Aries is seen pulling out a hefty book.

“What’s that?” Brody asks, still breathing heavily after the like.

“An atlas,” Aries responds. “From 1986, it seems. The phone’s dead, the headlight’s are busted. But we have our flashlights. So for now we can stay up till sunrise to plan, and hope the goons don’t catch us.”

“What do you have in mind?” Blaze asks.

“Look here,” Aries says. He opens the atlas to a bookmarked page. “There’s a tunnel that runs from this highway to another highway, highway 92, that was abandoned years ago. It runs so close to the Auditor’s lair that I wouldn’t be surprised

if it were connected in some way. If it wasn't, then we do Plan B.”

“What’s Plan B?” they both ask.

“This car is filled with a ton of gasoline. It’s a full tank.” Aries turns to Blaze. “You will have to use your ability to light that thing up and explode this whole place down. The catch is --”

Mary suddenly takes a loud gasp. “Mary!” They all turn toward her.

“It’s... **not**... worth... **it**...” she lets out.

“What’s not worth it?” Brody asks, worried about her.

“I had a dream... he repaired the device. And a tunnel... Adam is waiting for you there... but not for... a... good... reason.” Mary’s breathing slows, and slows, and she returns to a slumber.

They all look at each other.

Aries swings back towards the front of the car. “Go. We need to go. Now.”

Aries pulls out the keys, revs up the car again, and slams down on the pedal. They’re off.

XIX

BROKEN TUNNELS

They don't know where they're going. It's still nowhere close to sunrise. Their flashlights are still too weak to see anything. These roads that they are on haven't been maintained in a while, since new highways and roads were built.

70. 80. 90. Pushing the rickety car well beyond the speed limit -- although nobody's enforcing the laws here. They hop over hills and flash by the trees, but all that they see in front of them is pitch black.

"The tunnel should just be right ahead," Aries mutters.

"You think this'll work?" Brody says. "Mary had already warned us. We're putting our lives at stake, and even Adam's."

"Don't worry, we got this," says Aries, "so long as we don't mess up. Think about it once we get there."

And they stop to where they thought the tunnel started. As they walk around, they notice a broken, overgrown pathway. They shine their flashlights and notice a row of dilapidated cars scattered across the path. They seemed pretty new, not one of the older cars that Aries had.

"Huh. Weird. I thought you said this path was abandoned way back when," Blaze points out.

"Eh, it's probably unimportant. Probably someone just

put broken down cars here for someone to salvage.”

“Alright,” Blaze says. And they trudge on the broken path, hoping that the tunnel is up ahead.

As they continue, they spot a mound of vines that appear to be on a metal sign. Brody shines the light towards it. It had scribbles of spray paint over what it says, but they could still make it out.

CONTINUE TO TUNNEL

HIGHWAY 97 - 14 mi.

TURN ON AIR RECYCLE

“Alright,” says Brody. “This is what we’re looking for. I’ll get the car, get Mary, and we’ll continue on.” Brody runs back to the car, all of them hop in, and they keep driving. Slowly and cautiously, they continue to drive on. The abandoned cars seem to stop appearing, and soon enough, the road starts to dip.

Aries pulls out the atlas again. “We can go a little faster now. We still have 6 miles to go.” He observes as the tunnel entrance appears, still open and never boarded up. It’s riddled with vines and leaves and fungi, but past that, it seems to be clean...ish.

They spot another sign. This time, not a highway sign like what they saw earlier. It is a wooden sign, but clean and seems to have been placed recently.

DO **NOT** ENTER

THEY LURK AND WAIT FOR **YOU**

“Somebody’s already been here,” Aries says. “Watch

out.”

They stop at the front of the tunnel and get out. Through the vines, they spot a breaker switch that seems to connect to the lights. Aries opens it, tries to switch it on, but to no avail. Still dark, still black. They decide to keep moving on.

They hop back in the car and keep on. They watch the odometer, now at 314,589 miles, counting as the numbers flip by. They couldn't see anything out the windows. It is pure void out there, like they were driving in space. But as soon as they cross the six-mile mark, it all flashes in their eyes. All the lights turn on, one section at a time, flickering before they remain on. A familiar hue of yellow, it glows brightly.

“What... happened.” A familiar voice says, suddenly a loud groaning noise is heard nearby but there's multiple groans harmonizing in one giant moan. They all burst out of the car holding unconscious Mary. Whilst running through the moaning noise, they spot a small window leading into a room, just big enough to fit through. Aries decides to stay back and take guard, while Brody decides to jump through, landing on his feet, while Blaze is holding Mary just behind him. But as soon as he got in, he heard a person coming from the side of the room. Suddenly, the person tackles Brody to the ground and repeatedly punches him with full force.

“GET READY JACK, GET READY TO SHO-” Brody right hooks him in the face, knocking him to the ground as Brody tops over him pinning him down, while Blaze jumps through the

window with Mary in hand,

“OH. GOD,” Blaze exclaims, “BRODY, STOP!” He doesn't stop. “STOP!” He doesn't respond. “BRODY!”

“WHAT!?” Brody finally screams in response.

“Look up.” Blaze says. Brody looks up.

“Oh god,” Brody says “Easy son, don't do it” He says, while the little kid stares at Brody, holding a pistol with his finger steady on the trigger.

“Get off him,” the small child orders. Brody slowly moves off the older dude.

“It's fine, Jack. They're good, they're good,” the older dude says.

“I don't trust them,” the kid says.

“It's fine,” the older dude says. The younger kid reluctantly lowers his gun and sets it on a table. “I'm sorry about that, I thought you were one of those monsters.”

“It's okay, so did I,” Brody admits.

“I got your name, Brody?” the older dude says. “Well I'm Jeremy, and this is Jack, my younger brother.”

“Blaze, and this is Mary,” Blaze says.

“Oh god what happened to her?” Jeremy says, Brody and Blaze look at each other knowing they would be killed by them if they told them that Mary was possessed.

“She got hit pretty hard,” Blaze says.

“Yeah, some dude jumped us and attacked us. Mary got hit in the head with a metal pole.” Brody adds.

“Well you’re welcome to join us if you want,” Jeremy says.

“Thanks for your help,” Brody says, “but I think we’re fi-”

“Yeah, sure!” Blaze cuts in. Brody turns to Blaze and leans towards her.

“I don’t trust them. They don’t seem genuine,” Brody whispers in Blaze’s ear.

“Yeah, but we need more people, safety with others and all that,” Blaze whispers back.

“Fine. But if we get killed because of them, it’s on you.” Brody whispers. He turns back towards the two kids. “Yeah, sure, we’ll join you,” Brody says.

“Well, nice to have you in the team,” Jack says,

“Well, where are you heading to? We might be able to go with y’all,” Jeremy says,

“We’re heading out somewhere west, towards Auditor.CO” Brody says.

“You’re just in luck, we’re also heading towards the west too,” Jeremy says, “but we gotta wait.”

“Why?” Brody says.

“We have to wait for all of the possessed to clear.”

“Well, alright,” Brody says.

“You’re welcome to put Mary down if you need to” Jeremy says while kicking a beat-down mattress to Blaze. Blaze carefully lays Mary onto the mattress,

“Go get some rest,” Jack says.

“Thanks,” Brody and Blaze say whilst sitting down on a couch. Brody turns back towards Blaze.

“Do you know where Aries went?” Brody asks Blaze.

“He should be in the tunnels.”

Brody looks out the window. Mysteriously, the car is gone, and so is Aries. “He ain’t there.”

“Really?” Blaze turns to the window as well, looking out, left, and right, with no car in sight.

“He’ll come back. I’m sure he knows something we don’t.”

...

Aries sees something. A vision from some... entity. Aries needed to be there. At Auditor.CO. Now. Images seem to flicker in his head, but he can’t make them out. But he notices a recurring theme, the Auditor.CO building emitting a purple ray, and the Rifts encapsulating the whole world.

He runs back to the car and takes off, once again stepping, almost standing, on the gas pedal. Once again the car pushed it to 70, 80, 90, and the tunnel lights became strobe lights. But then an apparition suddenly appears in front of him. He slams the brakes, thinking he ran over something, He gets out of the car, to see nothing. He looks up and slowly retracts back to his car, but the same groaning loud becomes louder. And louder. And louder. He stops. He looks back. He starts instantly dashing away, one step after another. The lights begin to flicker, and all

of a sudden the ground violently ruptures in a flood of purple. He tries to stop and runs in the opposite direction, but sees a swarm of possessed people coming at him. There isn't anything he could do. He looks around. The purple tears in the world around him only grow bigger. The swarms only get closer. But he notices something far away. A door. He runs towards it. The groans get louder. The Rifts grow bigger. But he rips open the door and locks it shut.

Still holding on the door behind him, he sighs. He looks up once again to see an office room. Aries spots a sign. "Tunneler Parking Services." A couch. A desk. An elevator. And a dead plant in the corner. He looks down to see the orange office tiles, somehow scratched up, even though nobody seemed to come through here. He walks over to the couch and spots a clock. 2:14 AM. He decides to sit on the couch, and soon he dozes off.

XX

WHAT LURKS UNDER

3:47 AM. At least, that's what the clock read. Suddenly, the entire group is woken up by a loud groaning sound.

“SHOOT, IT'S AN AMBUSH!” Brody screams. Everybody turns to the window and spots an unrecognizable dark figure standing in it, almost as if it were a human. It soon turned out to not be, and suddenly the figure jumps into the window, breaking the glass in it. The figure picks itself up.

“!YDAERLA EID UOY T'NOW YHW” The figure screams the unknown gibberish cutting the silence.

Suddenly, more possessed people get into the room surrounding them, breaking the walls of the tunnel within. Jeremy jumps up out of the makeshift bed and swipes his pistol from where it rested. He points, gets ready, and shoots. Nothing.

“DANG! SOMEONE GET ME SOME AMMO!” Jeremy screams out. As he says this the swarm's groans pierce their ears. Brody looks for a case of bullets, and throws one over to Jeremy. He tries to load them as fast as he could. He points the gun to the possessed and pulls the trigger.

BANG! The gun shoots the bullet, breaking the noise as one collapses to the ground. More shots fire. *BANG! BANG!*

“HEAD BACK! THERE SHOULD BE A DOOR OVER THERE LEADING TO THE SURFACE!” Jeremy screams past the noise. They all rush to the door in a hurry, with Jeremy staying back while more shots fire. They open the doors and rush up the dark staircase, hoping that the exit is open. Jeremy continues to try to fend off the possessed, and luckily, all the possessed collapse, scattering on the floor. He runs, thinking that there could be more, and slams the door behind him. Running up the staircase he could hear screams coming from the top. He skips steps trying to get to the top as soon as possible. As he reaches the top, he sees the hallway riddled with purple cracks. He spots the rest of the crew at the opposing end.

“THE DOOR IS LOCKED!” They holler across the hallway, and as Jeremy tries to navigate over the cracks, they only grow in number. Soon he gets to the other side, with an island of space left to him. They try with all the force they can to pry open the door, but it doesn’t budge at all. But soon they feel the doorknob turn.

“Finally!” Blaze sighs. As they hesitantly creep through, they see the sign. *TUNNELER PARKING SERVICES*.

“I thought this door led to the surface,” Brody says. But nobody says anything else, and soon they continue to creep up. They look over and notice... Aries is still sleeping on the couch. They turn their tip-toes into a run, and try to wake him up.

“ARIES!” Brody shakes his shoulders violently. “WAKE UP!”

“Oh, um...” Aries mutters as his eyes slowly open.
“What time is it?”

“Almost 4. We need to go,” Jeremy says.

“Wait,” Aries says as he gets up, “Who are you?”

“Jeremy, Jack,” Blaze points the two of them out.
“Aries.”

“Nice to meet ya,” they both say. Aries hops out of bed and turns towards the elevator at the end of the room.

“Shall we go?” Aries asks. But then he notices Mary still knocked out in Blaze's arms. “Leave her here on the couch to rest. We can head down to whatever this parking garage is. I think we'll be safer down here than in these tunnels, and from there we can find a way to Auditor.CO.”

Blaze rests Mary down on the couch and they all face each other. Aries stands by Jeremy and Jack and says, “If you see anything out of the ordinary, shoot it and kill it by any means necessary.”

They both agree and head to the elevator. Surprisingly, it works. Suddenly the elevator stops as the lights flicker. And then, it starts going down again, but suddenly it feels like gravity is turned off as the elevator descends faster, and faster. Soon the elevator crashes onto the floor. The door opens up and a large boiler room greets them.

“Who the heck puts a boiler room under a parking lot?”
Jeremy says.

Aries, recovering from the fall, says “I don't know and I

don't care. WE NEED TO GET TO THE PARKING LOT, NOT HERE!" But there was no use for screaming, The boiler is arranged in such a way that it's like a maze.

"Does the elevator still work?" Jack says and turns around.

"DO YOU THINK THAT USELESS SON OF A GUN STILL WORKS?!" Aries screams, but immediately stops himself. "Sorry, sorry, but we can't go back the other way."

"Ya think there's a staircase to the lot?" Brody asks.

"Hopefully. But we have to navigate this maze," Blaze asserted.

They step further from the elevator and return to their slow walking. They decide to turn left towards the visible boilers, hoping that it would be somewhere of importance. But all they find is more and more hallways.

"Hey, look, a sign!" Jack exclaims. They all face toward him and then toward the sign.

WARNING:

DO ~~NOT~~ ACTIVATE THE BOILERS

DURING THE HOURS OF 10PM - 6AM

DOING SO WILL ~~DISRUPT~~ Civilians To give you a good time

The sign seems to have faded over time, with the orange text being hard to read. But they keep on.

The lights flicker many times over, and sporadically turn off and on for lengths of times. Aries, with his flashlight in hand, turns it on.

Blaze feels her hands along the walls as they walk. But she feels something unusual on the walls, and as she takes her hand off it, they turn towards a door.

“HECK YES! AN EXIT! I knew it wouldn’t be so ha-” Jeremy says while opening the door only to see another part of a boiler room.

“H-hey big bro?” Jack says weakly.

“Yeah bud?” Jeremy says.

“It’s feeling a bit hot...” Jack says. Everyone is feeling an overheated wave pass their body, everyone except for Blaze.

“Quit your whining, why don’t ya?” Blaze says.

“Actually I feel it too. It’s really hot here,” Aries says.

“Yeah, me too,” Brody says.

“Now that you say it, it’s hotter than the sun here” Jeremy says. Aries grabs a thermometer off a nearby table.

“GOD! IT’S 120 DEGREES!” Aries screams. “Blaze, why don’t you feel anything? It’s scorching!”

“Perhaps it has something to do with my fire ability.” Blaze says

“I DOESN’T MATTER, JUST RUN!” Jeremy screams. They run into another room, almost tripping over each other, one after another Aries glances at the thermometer, 68 degrees it reads.

“GUYS LOOK! It’s room temperature!” Aries says.

“Finally,” Brody says. “It was so arid in there.” As he fans himself, he leans over on the wall, but his back inadvertently flips a lever on the wall.

Suddenly all the lights flicker on, but then they hear metallic gears and bearings start to spin. Steam begins to fly out of the machinery over on the side of the room. Brody flips around and looks at the lever he switched.

BOILER ACTIVATION SWITCH

Now everyone turns and stares at the lever. “Hey, didn’t it say *not* to turn on the boilers at night?” Blaze queries.

Brody turns around to face them. “Uhhh...”

“It doesn’t matter! Come on lets g-” Jack says but gets cut off by getting tackled by a possessed.

“JACK! I GOT YOU!” Jeremy screams.

BANG! BANG!

2 shells of metal bullets drop to the ground.

“JACK! Are- are you okay?” Jeremy says.

“Yeah” Jack says. Immediately after he gets up, more possessed dash into the room from the corner..

“SHOOT! GUYS, RUN!” Blaze screams. Out of instinct they all run back into the room... The burning hot room. But the possessed don’t follow. “Guys, look! They don’t like heat!”

“H-huh?” Aries says. Due to the unbearable heat they can’t think. All of the possessed leave although Brody, Aries, Jeremy and Jack are passed out due to the heat.

“No no no no no.” Blaze says. Blaze drags all of them out of the room. “Oh god. Please don’t do this to me, please...” “Okay, I’ll look for an exit, stay here” She says as she runs away “Okay-okay-okay-okay..” Blaze says to herself. “Just find an exit, that’s all I need to do” Suddenly a possessed jumps on her “GOD.”

“!su morf nur t’nac ,uoY” The possessed says. But Blaze throws up a heat storm to burn the corruption inside.

“Phew,” Blaze says, but just then even more possessed run into the room. “GOTTA GO!” Blaze pushes through the hoard of possessed, running through room after room after room until they stop, Blaze looks at a nearby thermometer.

“160 degrees! Phew im sa-” Blaze says but gets cut off by a loud banging noise. She peeks out the door from the room. The boilers in the room start to shake, pressure of the boiler is on high, just then one of the boilers cracks as steam escapes from it. “That doesn’t sound so good.” She quickly runs to the other side of the room which lies a door. She goes through the door and closes it behind her, just before the water begins to spray across the room. She glances at a door far away. Exit, The sign above the door reads. “Perfect! An exit!”

Just then, a dark, gooey figure enters the corridor from behind her.

“SU MORF NUR T’NAC UOY ?uoY era erehW” The gooey entity says.

“WHAT IS THAT THING?!” Blaze questions. She

conjures a heat storm to efficiently kill the monster... but the entity still stands, seemingly unaffected by the wave of heat.

“WHAT THE?! IT SHOULD BE ON THE GROUND DEAD!” Mary screams.

“**!!SUGNID UOY AH**” The gooey entity gibberish doesn’t make any sense. It latches on to Blaze to strangle her to death.

“GET OFF OF ME!!!!” Blaze screams in terror. She manages to get out of the entity's grasp and runs out the door, locking it from the inside.

“PHEW! Oh, would you look at that. We’re back in the parking lot. I should check on Mary.” Blaze says. She continues up and on her way back to Mary, who is still unconscious. “Hey, you okay?” Blaze asks. Mary gives no response, just a slight, suspicious twitch.

Blaze yawns. “Ah. I should get some rest.” She sits by the side of Mary, and soon dozes asleep.

...

BANG! BANG-BANG!

Blaze wakes up almost instantly.

She hears a voice from behind. “What the hell is going on?”

The elevator opens. The clouds of steam pour out of the cabin. Four familiar figures, yet unknown to Blaze, reveal themselves out of the fog. They croak and limp their way to Blaze. She tries to send a gust of flame over and through their

heads. But the flames seem to pass through them. They inch closer, and closer. Slowly, they jostle through the old, wet furniture.

Blaze stares at them, yet can't decipher them. Hesitantly, she turns around and unsurely skips towards the door. She tries to force the doorknob to open but it won't budge at all. She kicks it and it doesn't shift. Finally, in one desperate measure, she heats up her hand like a hot plate and holds it out firmly, forcing the door to open.

Nothing happens.

"Hey, wake up." A voice calls out to her.

Everything resets to what it was. No steam, no open doors, and no lights.

She slowly gets up from her bed. It's Mary.

"Where're the rest of the gang? They were here!"

"Oh... oh... SHOOT! Those dratted weaklings... I guess I kind-of have to go down there again."

"Down there? Where?"

"There's this boiler room..."

"Huh? What boiler room?"

"Well, we went in the elevator an-" Blaze says but then gets interrupted by a door creaking.

...

"Dang..." Jack slowly rises from the concrete floor, only to be met with a dense fog where he can barely see his whereabouts.

"Hello?" He calls out.

Aries coughs out, “Hi – I’m – here...” He coughs again, whacking his backside as he does so.

“Where’s... what’s her name again? Blade?”

“Blaze. And where is she?”

Jack wanders towards Aries’ direction. “Not here. I can’t see her aro –”

Just then, he encounters the sleeping bodies of Jeremy and Brody, lying there by the open entrance of the hall.

“Hey,” he kicks. “Get up.”

With no response in hand, he drags them to the outside of the hall, and spots Aries over at the end of the corridor, seeking an exit. “Yo, can you drag them out of here?” Jack yells over.

“Wait up,” Aries calls back. “I need to find this exit... or at least the switch to turn this boiler-thing-that-I-don’t-even-know-how-it-is-here thing off!”

Jack resorts to dragging them both by the hand, but then the both of them notice and wake up.

“Dang-nabbit, Jack, what are you doing –” Jeremy screeches, before noticing the fog before them.

Brody opens his eyes without saying a word. In fact, he couldn’t speak at all. He opened his mouth but no words spilled out. Aries, suspending his quest to open the exit, returns to Jack and the two, just picking themselves up.

“Get up. We need to get ourselves out of here.”

The sounds of the leaking steam rapidly overtakes the

words of any of them. Clouds and fog develop everywhere you look, effectively blinding everyone there.

“Follow my voice!” Aries calls, “WE NEED to get out of here before it’s too late!”

Aries runs over to the other side of the corridor that he was in before and reencounters the door he was trying to pry open.

The group convenes around the blood-colored door. The window shows nothing behind it except a canvas of darkness.

Aries whacks it with his leg a few times, denting the tired sheets of metal doing its best to stay put. Beyond the banging, though, another hit is heard on the opposing end of the hall. The plumes of steam only grow louder, and faster, and denser.

Brody, through his desperate coughing, manages to let out a few words, though weakly. “Gun. Use -- gun. Door.”

He then limps his way over back to the other side of the corridor. Aries, still kicking the door, pauses for a bit. “Brody, where are you going?”

He hears no response as Brody drifts away into the fog.

XXI

ASPHYXIATION FIXATION

“God, it’s so cloudy in here. Hello? Where are you guys?” Brody weakly says. “Guys... That’s not funny. GUYS?!” He can’t seem to find the rest of the group.

With the gun in his hand, he studies it silently. A quaint little revolver it is, something that you would see from a Wild West movie. Two bullets remain in that cylinder, and a case of another pack of bullets remain in his other pocket, just in case. As the fog narrows his vision, he tries to see past it; within his sight he sees nothing but a door.

He wanders about some more, unable to speak, still looking for the group.

PANG!

The sound of a roaring faucet interrupts all trains of thought. As he begins to walk again, pooling under him becomes pure heat, like a stovetop floor. He looks beneath himself, and what he sees is water bubbling in the heat. Upon sight of the room becoming a cooking pot, his feet immediately feel like it is on fire.

He runs across the room in a mixture of panic and instinct. Hop, hop, hop, run. His feet burn even more, scalding in the

FROM THE AUTHORS

We are the Flaraway. Usually we're just a group of kids having fun on video games, but this time we've made a book.

The book was never meant to be a professional project. However, it was meant to be a fun project meant to slam our creative thoughts onto paper. It may be a whirlwind, it may not be the best book out there, or written as such. But it's our creation that we're proud of.

We were play-fighting like an epic movie scene like children in November of 2021. I recorded the whole thing, like a movie we stitched together. Very improvised. But then later on, we decided to turn it into a book. And because of this, we continued to add to the plot and make the story more interesting.

We hope you enjoyed it.

Sebastian Rugas

Co-writer, member of the Flaraway.

Hello, Greetings, Salutations, reader! This is the Flaraway, just a group of kids with an overactive imagination, this is the founder of the Flaraway group also known as Cabunoc, Kristian Gage. It's been a dream of mine to become a writer, and I think it helped us to be the person we know now. And yeah, I've also wanted to become a YouTuber.

As you heard from my fellow friend Sebastian Rugas, we play-fighted and thought, "Hey, wouldn't it be crazy if we filmed this and made a book?" So we did, and I've got to hit one of the best roles, the Auditor! Sorry that this ended in a sad note, let's hope there is still more **FAITH** in the group.

Kristian Gage, Cabunoc

Co-writer, founder and member of the Flaraway

This is based on a true story. (I was tryna scarE ya) Anyway, you're probably wondering, why Should I read this? And honestly we don't know. We just did this for Clout and money. I acted as KAi and Brody. This all started with me and Kristian pretending to fight and we decided to record it. That's how it became The Glitching Outcome. I want to make this long so you guys think that I wrote a lot. That's what this is.

Sang this over the hill that is why my dog hit my kitty with a spatula. While that happened my dog decided to twerk on me and it felt six so I Pet his juicy butt and rubbed it against the wall and Nutella got on the wall. I lickEd it out of curiosity and it tasted funny. I still swallowed it. It was a fun fest. And by the way 7-11 released a new slushie flavor called Wall Nutella. It tasted like the situation before I still swallowed it. Then I saw and tasted colors. The juicy butt was still in my face. So I rubbed it against the wall and Nutella got on the wall. I licked it out of curiosity and it tasted funny. I still swallowed it. It was a fun fest. Then my dog hit my kitty with a spatula. While that happened my dog decided to twerk on me and it felt six so I pet his juicy butt and rubbed it against the wall and Nutella got on the wall. I licked it out of curiosity and it tasted funny. I still swallowed it. It was a fun fest. Finally, I sang this over the hill that is why my Nutella hit my kitty with a spatula. While that happened my Nutella decided to twerk on me and it felt six so I pet his juicy butt and rubbed it against the wall and dog got on the wall. I licked it out of curiosity and it tasted like furries. I still swallowed it. It was a fun fest.

Jason Pobre

Movie actor, Co-writer, member of the Flaraway

[REDACTED]

Hi! If you are able to read this you are able to see this secret message. You are one of the first to see this text in our job, as you are reading this the farle call is working on a website with a bunch of sites to find. Although there is no website yet it is lurking

Have fun decoding this

[UNKNOWN]

Creator of Blaze Lighting for Movie

The Rifts Will Rip Once More.