

Guardian Chronicles

A legend begins

Prologue by Matt

You don't know me yet but my name is Matt. I am part of the Guardian Matrix. You'll meet me later in this story but for the moment I'm here to help. Have you ever felt like you had the worst luck in the world? Like everything in the universe was working against you? At times we all have. But our Hero Etan really does have bad luck. He is always at the wrong place at the wrong time. Join him in his adventures and see what its like to over come that, and become a true hero? Maybe you have a hero inside of you already. Read on and see how you would react to being given great power. See what its like to be a Guardian. Let your legend begin.

The end of the beginning

Commentary

Here he was, lying in a hospital, soon to die. The doctors had stabilized him, but he wasn't in good health anymore. At least he got to do one heroic thing in his life. Etan went to the bank, witnessed a robbery and tried to stop the thief. He stepped in front of the man and attempted to take his gun, and got shot. Ironically, he saved the life of the manger that years ago foreclosed on his mortgage. He always wanted to be a hero, but constantly messed it up. It might seem silly to others why a seventy five year old man would try to fight a bank robber, but it was his last chance to do something noble. His whole life was one failure or disaster after another. This morning he went to the bank, saw the robber and tried one last time to make a difference. He was rushed to the hospital, and the bullets extracted. He felt weak and knew he would die soon. Etan reached for a pen and paper on the desk, so he could write a goodbye note to a friend. Sitting next to his bed was a strange man. He didn't look like any doctor he'd ever seen. How did he get in here? He didn't remember him coming in.

Matt's comments

By the way throughout the story I'll be translating for you since you don't speak the over thirty different dialects used around the Galaxy. As much as I can I'll use earth terms and ways of speaking. By the way your planets nice but quit killing each other, it's not helping you any.

Selar, a regent of the Guardians

I made a surprising discovery today. For the last year I have been tracking the progression of the human race. My goal is to record their emotional growth as a species. My research is almost complete. Our time is their year 1494. I have been jumping a head ten years at a time and recording their changes and history. I hoped they would have shown better progress. They are a volatile and selfish species. They hunt animals to extinction, pollute their oceans, and create weapons that could render their planet lifeless. They elect government officials based on popularity and idolize people with athletic ability instead of wisdom. They also have no central religion or language to unite them. This race is one of the most emotionally immature groups I've ever encountered. But I met a man in December 2012 who is honorable. I am going to offer him a chance to train to become a Guardian. Although there have been occasional honorable individuals in thier history for the most part this race is un-teachable. If the man can become a Guardian there could be some faint hope for this species yet.

From bed to undead.

Etan's comments

I considered the man for a moment; I was surprised more than anything. He was an older man dressed in a purple robe that was trimmed in gold. He had long white hair and a beard that reached to his chest. His overall appearance reminded me of a mythological wizard, except that he didn't have the silly hat. He was sitting back in the chair with his arms in his lap, in a relaxed manner. He just sat there staring at me. So I spoke first "Umm, hello. Are you the Reaper, because if you are, you don't look anything like your pictures?" He chuckled "That's a very ironic thing for you to ask me." He spoke in a tone, as if he were a father comforting his child. "Tell me, Etan how would you like the chance to regain your health and to live a life of significance." I wondered how he knew my name but I simply responded "yeah, who wouldn't." He stood up put his hand on my shoulder and said "Let's take a walk". He rose up and I was pulled up with him. We flew up and out, through the ceiling as if we were ghosts. Oh great I thought I must be dead. The strange old man read my mind and said "You're not dead, not yet." We quickly flew past the clouds into the edge of space. This was both fun and terrifying. If this was a walk, I wondered what running was. Reading my mind again he said "This is running." We surged forward at terrifying speed, flying past hundreds of stars, and planets. We stopped after a moment and he said "Turn around and take a look". I looked back and there behind us was the entire Milky Way. From my perspective it looked no bigger than an orange. We just traveled billions of light years in the vacuum of space in a matter of seconds. Several questions came to mind like, why are we here and how did he do that? But the only thing I could manage to get out was "who are you?"

His voice seemed to echo across empty space. "My name is Cronos Selar. I am a Regent with the Guardian core. The core helps keep peace throughout thousands of galaxies. We find men of honor to fill our ranks. I think you might make a good Guardian. I found you by fortunate happenstance when I was recording this time frame. I saw you try to stop the thief, and also protect the man that did you harm many years ago." That was almost too much for me to take in at one time. I wondered if my horoscope had said something like expect a creepy old man to change your whole life today. "Actually" Selar stated with a smile "it said "Watch out for a renewed love interest at work. But don't count on that on from me." So he had a sense of humor. I stared at the Milky Way stretched out before me and again at him, and then I paused to comprehend it all. He waited patiently for me to get a handle on it. Finally I said "If you knew about me, you would know I'm always in the wrong place at the wrong time. My life is filled with one failure or disaster after another." He shook his head "You" he began "were in the right place at the right time, but did not have the ability to change the situation. You are subconsciously drawn to critical events; this is an asset not a liability. If you become a Guardian, that asset will be of great benefit to you and countless others. You think you're a failure but your not. You did save that man's life back in the war. He went on to become the father of three children. One who became a doctor and has saved many lives since. Your life counted much more than you think. But if you train as a Guardian you can save many more."

I finally got my composure back. I thought for a moment and asked "So what's the catch" He took on a serious demeanor. "The catch is it takes decades of training and discipline to learn. You must always put others needs first. You must use your power to serve the greater good, not for self glory, and never attack out of anger. The four main principles we operate by is **Discipline, Balance, Honor, and Justice**, You already possess great Honor, Discipline I can teach you if you are willing to learn, emotional balance takes time to mature, and justice is you knowing the right thing to do at the right time which is easier to know when you possess the other three." I laughed "I'm already 75 years old; I don't think I have that much time." He said "let me show you something."

He took me back to the Milky Way galaxy. There was a dark spherical shape in the void. "Do you see that rouge moon over there floating in open space" he asked. "Yes?" I said and shrugged. He took a deep breath and focused. How either one of us was breathing in space I'm not sure. An intense light exited his hands and hit the moon. In a few seconds it busted to pieces. He just destroyed an entire moon. That must be more powerful than all the atomic weapons on earth put together. "I don't want to destroy things, I've already seen enough destruction in my life." I said. "keep watching" He responded. He let out another energy wave but this time it was a warm glow. The energy field surrounded the fragments. They quickly pieced back together and after a few moments the moon was whole again.

Selar continued “The kind of power we possess is beyond anything you can imagine. Making you young again and keeping you that way is easily done” he explained. “So what do I need to do?” I asked. “I need a promise and commitment to follow the principles of the Guardian core, to uphold life, and promote peace. But it is not an easy thing to do. The path will be difficult. You will have to serve me as my personal servant while I train you. You will obey my every command without question. The kind of power we draw on can only be handled by the most disciplined of minds.”

“Your servant?” I asked confused. He nodded “A guardian master in turn is servant to the needs of the masses. He serves them, for the greater good. The first lesson is this, everyone serves something. Even a king serves the traditions of his people.” I was taken back, Selar seemed very wise. I let it sink in for a moment. Again he waited patiently letting me absorb this. “I’ll do it; I want to make a difference. I promise to follow all the ways of the Guardians and uphold all their principles.” I stated. He wasted no time, his hands flowed energy through me and in a moment I felt great. I could see from my hands that I was young again. I smiled and said “I was as good as dead shortly ago, does this make me undead now?” He chuckled slightly “Etan my boy, I see we are going to get along quit well.” Then Selar touched me on the shoulder again and my whole life quickly played out like a movie.

The past left behind

Etan O-Brantley was born just south of Little Rock Arkansas in May of 1938. He was supposed to be named Ethan but his birth certificate had a typo. His mother was superstitious about this so she kept his name Etan instead of Ethan. He was only there because his parents wanted him to be born as an American. He had a cousin that lived in the area so they stayed long enough for him to be born then they were off again. His parents spent most of their time in Indonesia and other parts of the world studying volcanoes. His father was a volcanologist and his mother a zoologist so traveling worked out well for both of them. Etan didn't like volcanoes, or traveling so when he was ten years old he moved back with his cousins until he graduated.

In 1956 he joined the army and fought in the Vietnam War. As he was pulling an unconscious buddy out of the line of fire when he was shot in the top of his right foot, by a stray bullet. The army doctors thought he had shot himself so he could be sent home. He was branded a coward and soon after he was released from the army with a dishonorable discharge. He started to work as carpenter's assistant in small town. Three years later both his parents were killed at Kilauea while studying the eruption. The ground gave way and they both fell into the lava underneath. That just confirmed his aversion to volcanoes. In 1969 he was thirty one years old and attended a concert known as Woodstock. A seventeen year old had a bad headache and he gave him some aspirin to help. Later he learned the teen had fallen asleep and was run over by a tractor. Even though Etan wasn't the one who drove the tractor, he felt responsible. If he had not given the teen the aspirin he would not have been sleeping so soundly. He could have awoken in time to get out of the way.

He was married in 1973 and divorced five years later. His wife left him because she said he had no real ambition and that he wasn't living up to his potential. She wanted a man who could amount to something. One year after that, he lost the house in the foreclosure. Sometimes it seemed like no matter what he did disasters happened. In 1980 he was talked into going to Washington State to celebrate his 42nd birthday. Mount Saint Helens erupted. He was out of the blast zone but he seemed to always be around when disasters occurred. In January of 1986 he went to watch the space shuttle challenger launch. Witnessing the breakup live was worse than it looked on Tv. Why did bad luck seem to follow him wherever he went? He attempted in 1991 to do volunteer work in the Philippines. It was the last straw. He met a guy who offered pay all his expenses. He went to the Philippines to help missionaries build churches. He was pretty good at most carpentry work. He should have known this was a problem waiting to happen. He had been there for two weeks when in June of that year mount Pinatubo erupted, its blast was ten times greater than mount saint Helens. He vowed, never again to go near another volcano. Pinatubo destroyed all the villages in a large radius around it. He stayed to help with the cleanup. He worked for the man who sent him there for a few months but Etan was never the same. He couldn't stand the idea that his life was such a failure. He went back to work for the carpentry store shortly there after and stayed on until now.

Matts comments

He had a sad life before, but now those experiences would serve him well. If you've had a sad life, maybe you're just a hero in training.

Reborn

It took a few moments before the whole transformation was complete. He infused me with Argarian Dna, and I was just reborn. I was no longer human but Argarian. They are highly intelligent beings with great power. They can manipulate matter and energy on the subatomic level. It wasn't just my body that changed but my mind also. Memories flood my consciousness. So many forgotten bits and pieces of my life now surfaced. I knew it would take time to absorb this new perspective. Just for an experiment I thought of a few math problems. I was never good at math before but now they seemed simple. Many concepts I had heard but never understood surfaced in my mind and came together like a jig saw puzzle. It was getting an advanced physics education in a just a matter of seconds. I even knew why light acted as a wave and a particle. Human scientist had been stumped over this for years. They thought light was dual natured but it was actually tri natured. A great many workings of nature passed through my mind and recombined in ways I never would have imagined.

Most things in nature seemed to be trinity based. The earth for example was land, water and air. Atoms were protons, neutrons and electrons. Even most life required food, water and air to survive. Light too was a trinity. Its third nature was a kind of energy. It saturates everything in the universe and links them together. It is like an infinite spider web that touches all matter and energy. Humans had a concept similar to that called dark matter and energy. But humans only knew a small aspect of a much larger truth. The final part of my rebirth was seeing the future. I saw a vision of me fighting a man in a dark robe. We were floating in space near a large object. The object looked like a black hole. The man and I both exchanged energy blasts at each other. I was knocked unconscious and the man floated over to finish me off. He drained the remaining life from me and kicked my body near the black hole. Selar told me what I saw a possible future, but it was not absolute. He said the event I saw was hundreds of years from now and I had plenty of time to change the outcome. I never forgot that vision, after that day. It gave me nightmares for years to come.

Earth year 1495-----Guardian year 5495

Matts comments

Hi! is me Matt again. The schools time is 517 years in the past of when Etan lived. Selar took him back to that time where Etan would begin a whole new kind of life. By the time he caught up with his own time, he would be a very different person entirely. This is his story.

Truth and trials.

Discipline, Balance, Honor, and Justice

Selar spent the next two days coaching Etan on the basics of Guardian life. The first eight years would consist of schooling, serving Selar, and following him around on missions. His title would be a sub cadet. This phase is meant to teach patience, discipline and humility. It also gives the trainee plenty of time to learn the Guardian system. As a phase one he was only allowed to use his abilities under Selar's supervision or in a school training exercise. If he passed all tests of phase one he would then be considered a full fledged cadet. He would be given a Guardian uniform but one without the cape. A guardians cape was a symbol of status and rank. It usually took several decades of this training for an individual to grow to the point of being considered for a silver Guardian. If he graduated to a silver he would be given his first silver cape. Silver guardians worked under blue planetary guardians but could go on missions by themselves and usually had specific territories they were responsible for. Before he could even start phase one, though he had to go in front of the Guardian counsel for testing. Selar would not say what the test consisted off, but Etan hoped he could pass.

Selar took Etan to his palace. He was lead into the upper most room of the central spire. The door opened up to a large crystal chamber. The chamber shone like a diamond in a display case. The room had five thrones. Sitting in the top most throne was a man in a glowing robe. Selar had told Etan that he was Cronos Mikeil the white guardian. He was

over all the Guardians in this galaxy. Just in front of him were four thrones. Three were occupied by the other gold level, also called Regent Guardians. They wore purple robes with gold trimming just like Selar. The first was called Cronos Polaris, the second, Cronos Rigel, the third was Cronos Major, and last was Etan's new master Cronos Selar.

All similar to star names, Etan wondered if there was a connection. Selar stood before the counsel and stated "I offer Etan as a candidate for Guardian training." He then walked forward and took his place among the counsel. His was the throne to the far right. Selar addressed Etan "We are going to ask you some questions, it is very important that you speak truthfully. Now, I noticed each of the five members of the counsel had completely different styles in clothes and mannerisms. Polaris was dressed in the ancient Babylonian style. While Rigel looked Greek. Major, a Celtic king and Selar was dressed like a mythological wizard. Finally the commander himself was sitting in a meditative position and looked similar to a Buddhist monk.

Matt comments

I was here for this, though Etan didn't see me.

Discipline

Cronos Polaris who was on the left most throne, spoke first "*If normally the ends do not justify the means, then is it ever right to do a wrong if it accomplishes something good.*" These guys were hitting me with the big guns of right and wrong right off the bat. If I had known I would be asked these kinds of questions I could have read up on ancient proverbs and wisdom. "that's really not a fair question" I said "It's never right to do a wrong, but sometimes you don't have any choice but to choose the lesser of two evils until a better choice comes along." Polaris nodded "correct, evil disguises itself in many ways, you must always be on guard. Keeping yourself in check is the key to discipline." I was defending my point; I didn't know I was answering.

Balance

Cronos Rigel spoke next "*What is emotional balance?*" I answered "Is it when you accept that you have emotions but are not controlled by them." Rigel responded "yes but how is that done" I always loved psychology so I had an idea of what Rigel was looking for "By coming to terms with what inhibits you, letting go of old grudges, forgiving others and yourself for mistakes, and setting small goals to help you grow along the way." I answered. Rigel responded with "You have much to learn to this subject, but that is a good start. Emotional balance does begin with acceptance and emotional cleansing."

Honor

Cronos Major spoke up "*What makes a person want to be honorable?*" I strained to think philosophically but was nervous and couldn't think of a wise answer. "I don't know, maybe because their taught to be honorable." Then Polaris asked "What if a man comes from a dishonest family, does he have to be dishonest like them?" I cringed because I knew I had answered wrong. "no, he can be honest if he chooses" Polaris spoke again "Ask yourself this, what you would feel if you knew you had acted dishonorably." That one was easy "I'd be ashamed." He asked me one more time. "So what is your answer?" I thought then stated "He acts honorably because he feels a sense of honor within himself." Polaris nodded his head "Correct, honor comes from a man's own character not outside influences or circumstances. This is the key to true honor."

Justice

Cronos Selar asked his question "*How do you know what is just?*" I took time to think this one out, for a moment before answering. I had argued this thought with others before. Most people considered going against a law unjust but not all laws were just. Abortion was legal in my state but being legal didn't make it right. I hoped this was correct

“when following a law or way does not create evil actions.” Selar looked pleased and said “Partially correct, but what else? Can a law be just, but its application unjust?” “yes” I began, “the spirit of the law needs to agree with the letter of the law” Selar nodded “A simplistic answer but acceptable. Laws and intents are a complex subject and must be weighed out before acting. True justice is never accomplished by simply adding more laws.”

Cronos Mikel, the leader acted next. He waved his hand and the scene changed. I was standing on a mountain peak over looking two smaller peaks below, one on the left and the other on my right. There were three children on one edge and an elderly man on the other. Mekeil spoke “They both are about to fall, which do you save?” This was another moral type of question I had debated with other people before. I answered “Wouldn’t it matter who was going to fall first? If you timed it right maybe you could save both the children and the man.” Mekeil nodded and said “correct, there is no one solution that solves all problems, a Guardian must be open to many solutions.” The scene changed back to the crystal chamber and the counsel closed their eyes confirming with each other. After a moment they opened their eyes and Selar spoke “It is a unanimous vote, you are accepted as a Guardian candidate.” And with that this test was over. Etan felt great relief. When they left, Selar told Etan he did quite well. “Even when they said I had the right answer I felt like I had messed up” Selar looked at him with amusement “The questions were not just about information, but a way of testing your character. It's not as much what you know; it's about who you are.” Etan shook his head “You guys think of everything” Selar smiled at Etan again. “One day you'll be on the other side, anticipating others actions.” Etan was allowed go to his new room to absorb the implications of his new life.

Etans comments

In two days I began the schooling part of my training. Before then I would see some of Selars missions. I would learn what my duties and responsibilities would be. I imagined doing some great physical labors, towing heavy loads, or cleaning nasty trash bins. I was sure those things would come too, but for now I was more like a personal assistant. I carried a hand held computer, much like a pda on earth. I used it to record events and schedules for Selar. Sometimes Selar would have me bring items or perform specific tasks, but mostly I was there to watch and learn. After each meeting Selar would review the events and ask me questions about the situation. I had to make sure I paid good attention. But Selar never raised his voice or said anything unkind. When I got an answer wrong, Selar would explain the correct answer. It amazed me how someone like Selar with so much power could be humble and kind. All too soon the day came to start school. As it turned out the academy was on the same land as Selar's palace ship. I found it interesting that the palace ship and school had a mid-evil feel about it in style. The ship was on a dead world that Selar was working to Terraform it to humanoid standards. The academy was not just for Guardians in training but also for several other divisions working for the Guardians. They had diplomats and warriors alike who worked for them. I noticed that there were no other Guardian cadets here. All the students I saw were from other divisions, I wondered why.

New kid in school commentary

His first class was basic stellar phenomenon. The class room was strangely similar to ones in high school back on earth. As the students filed in he could see most of them wore red clad uniforms indicating they were in the shield division. They were like the Guardians foot soldiers, helping to fight the smaller battles. As he understood it they came to school here for the basics then left for more advanced battle training elsewhere. The others in this class wore blue clad, showing they were of the diplomatic division. Maybe if he sat in the back, no one would notice him. But as soon as he entered the room however, several people began to stare at him. It was hard to hide the fact that he was the only one wearing grey. Why grey? If he was going to be a Guardian shouldn't he have been in gold or something?

The teacher entered the room and made the situation worse by announcing they had a new Guardian trainee. “Class we have a new student, Etan is our newest Guardian to be. Someday he will be your boss, so you might want to be nice to him.” The whole class turned around to look at him. Could this be another Guardian test? To see how he reacted to embarrassing situations. Etan politely nodded his head. The class itself was great. The teacher physically took them out in space and showed them the stars they were studying. If this was the way there classes operated he couldn't wait till

history class. It turns out for now he would have four classes a day, four days a week; Stellar basics, planetary diplomacy, bio-analysis, and galactic history. He tried to **inistiate** conversation with several people but no one seemed interested in talking to him. Maybe there was some mannerism or customs he was not observing correctly. Other than that his first day wasn't much different than a first day at a human school.

He noticed one odd thing. A strange kid dressed in black eyed him the whole time during lunch. He was all alone at the table where he ate. None of the others students came anywhere near him the whole time. Perhaps he was an outsider too. Later, one older gent walked up to Etan and introduced himself as Argyle. He was training for the logistics division. They were the ones who made sure all supplies got to where they were needed. They handled the shipping of goods and the records keeping. Not an exciting job but a necessary one. They got to wear green. Etan wondered why he couldn't wear green. Argyle was only about five foot tall and scrawny with no muscle. He looked like a pre-pubescent teenager. His beard was brown and scraggly. Actually since he was short, bearded and wearing green he reminded Etan of a leprechaun. Etan himself was fairly normal. Just less than six foot tall and a medium build. Nothing spectacular but considered average by most.

Etans comments

“Hi new guy, it looks like you need a friend. My name is Argyle.” He said. I stated “My name is Etan, and you're the first friendly face I've seen all day.” Argyle was very calm in his demeanor “keep in mind you're the only Guardian trainee here at the moment. You're alone, and one day if you become a Guardian everyone here will have to answer to you. There is a natural sense of jealousy or even fear.” He was right of course but it still bothered me. “I haven't done anything to them; they have no reason to hate me.” Argyle smiled in fatherly way “Give it time, they will get to know you. If you were picked as a candidate then you must be a great person.” I suddenly felt better. “You're obviously wise and you have a calm of spirit, maybe you could become a Guardian.” I told him. He chuckled, in much the same way Selar does. “They asked me too, but I declined.” I didn't see that coming. What? Why? “I have my own reasons.” He said “Maybe one day I'll share them with you, but for now, know I'll help you in any way that I can.” With that he left to go to his last class. Today had been a hard day, but not altogether a bad one.

The next three days went ok. Argyle gave me some advice of various classes and school projects. Students were required to work five hours during the week on the Terraforming project. I was assigned to train as a project safety attendant in the mining division. When trained I would check to see if all safety measures had been followed. It wasn't hard just tedious, there were a lot of details I had to look for. I'm new here, why did I get picked for this? “Surly there were others that were more qualified.” I asked Argyle “Your in logistics, wouldn't this be more in your area of expertise? Maybe, I can ask for a transfer?” He shook his head “It wouldn't do you any good, master Selar personally assigned you this and he doesn't do anything without good reason.” I sighed heavily “Well this is frustrating. I thought Selar was on my side, now he is trying to kill me. Maybe I should have just died in that hospital.” Argyle looked at me with an understanding demeanor and said “Patience my dear boy, patience.” I don't know why but I got ruffled over being called a boy. “I may look young but I'm seventy five years old” I defended. He chuckled “and I'm a thousand and seventy five, your still a child to me” I realized I was acting like a troubled kid “I'm sorry, your right, I'll just have to work hard and do my best.” Argyle had done this job before so was able to show me what I needed to know. Half way through the fourth day, I was just beginning to relax a bit, when I met the person who would become my biggest challenge.

Matt's comments

Pay attention to this next section. This guy's not all bad later but at first he's scary and dangerous.

My next prey

Scythe's comment

In my first year of school, I had personally run off three Guardian candidates. They left to work for other divisions. The first I tormented using a razor. I shaved him bald. Before that, he had long flowing locks that he was proud to have.

I started the name dead head around the school. He grew it back but the name stuck anyway. Three weeks later he was gone. Most people were afraid of me, and they should be. Whatever I say goes. The second I finally got to quit by putting a chemical in his shower that made him glow yellow for two weeks. His new name was little miss sunshine. When he broke down and cried in front of several people, I was really proud of myself that day. The third cracked after just one week of my attention.

I over heard him tell a friend he was nervous in tight places. I locked him in a cargo container full of packing foam. I put in a transport vessel going off world. He was in there for over 48 hours before it reached its destination. I heard it took three days before he could speak intelligently again. Or as intelligent as those puffed up God want to be's can be anyway. I was afraid no new ones would come this year and that I would be bored. But lucky for me, one candidate did show up. I would have to go slow with this one, or else the rest of the year would be monotonous. I must remember to hold back and torment him a little at a time, maybe he would last long enough for me to survive this year. Hopefully next year I'll have more Guardians to torment. I would have to enjoy every minute, like it was the best meal I ever had.

The first two days I just watched him from a distance. I am six foot three and he is just slightly shorter than me. He is around the same build but slightly less muscle tone. Good, I'll sweep the court with him at hover ball. Some mouse of a man in a green robe made friends with him. I think his name was ant-pile or something, I didn't matter. He wasn't the one I was after anyway. If he got in my way, I'd take him out too. On the fourth day I saw my chance to make the first strike. The grey god want to be was walking through the hall. I purposely ran into him. I made sure to knock his books out of his hands as we collided. Why did the Guardians even insist we still use old fashioned books anyway? Computer pads would be easier. It was that kind of thing that made me hate Guardians even more. I collided into him with enough force to knock him on the ground as well as cause him to drop his books. "Watch out where you're going jerk." I said. It was obvious that I ran into him but no one would challenge me on this. I looked around, and most people decided to back away slowly, trying not to draw attention to themselves. "Excuse me" the new guy said "I'm not sure how I managed to do that, I guess I'm still nervous about the new school" I gave him a long stare "Make sure it doesn't happen again." He made an open handed gesture. "I know this was an awkward way to meet, but maybe we can start over" he said. "My name is Etan and you are?" I turned like I was mad "Just stay out of my way" I told him and left. I watched him later; he didn't seem upset at all. So he could take a lot of provoking, all the better.

Matts comments

By the way they used books because books can't be bugged, hacked or get deleted. Sometimes the simplest solution is still the best.

Selar's training report

My new pick for Guardian has passed his first real challenge. I was interested to see how he handled our young trouble maker. It was obvious Scythe purposely ran into Etan but he handled it well. We allowed Scythe to harass three Guardian trainees last year as a test. We sensed weakness and unfortunately they caved in at the first sign of trouble. A Guardian's life is a hard one. That is why very few people can qualify. At first Etan was reluctant to take on the Terraforming assignment I gave him but with a little help he stepped up to the challenge. I asked Argyle to find Etan and offer his assistance. He has such a calming spirit I knew Argyle would be good for him.

Dark swarm Regent's report

The queen has commanded that the time has come to begin the incursion plan. The Guardian leaders are distracted with many galactic affairs. Stage two, the building of the doorway base has begun. All silent cell groups are being activated for this project. All red, green and black code agents are to report to central hub for new orders.

Matt comments

Ok here is the first important part to explain. The dark swarm is part of the dark Guardians. The dark Guardian's work to undo everything the Guardians are trying to accomplish. They try to bring about chaos and violence.

Blood, sweat, and tears.

The second week when school resumed, Argyle approached Etan and said "I heard you had a run in with our local assassin, they call him scythe." He shrugged "I guess, we ran into each other in the hall, no big deal." Argyle responded "Trust me it was no accident. He ran off three guardian trainee's last year. Most students fear him. His mother was in the stealth force, and he is too that's why he wears black. They are like secret agents. They tend to be temperamental, short fused and unstable. Now it seems, he has his sights set on you."

That was confusing. "Why do the Guardians allow such behavior, and how did he pass the council tests?" Etan asked. Argyle laughed "He didn't have too, only Guardian candidates have to pass that particular test." That figures, that's about my luck. "All the challenges I have to over come and I get sent to the school with an escaped mental patient." He told Argyle. Etan had a few more runs in with scythe in the following weeks. Sycthe would come up to Etan, insult him and try to provoke him. Sycthe even managed to slip a note on his back. Even though he was far from earth he still got the kick me sign on his back. Some things are universal.

Etan's comments

My powers training teacher was Master Leo, a retired Guardian. I found out later that back many years ago in some big Guardian battle he had gotten hurt in a way that could not be fixed. He still had powers but not to the full extent of what he used to have. But he still had the knowledge. He had an ancient look about him much like Selar. But his beard was short and grey. His face was so full of wrinkles that it gave him a grandfatherly appearance when he smiled. He even had the look of thinning skin and brittle bones. Despite his frail physique I knew inside was the lion that his name suggests. He used to be one of the Regents and equal in power to Selar himself. He still could have made a great planetary Guardian, but he wanted to teach. He had trained many of the planetary Guardians anyway. He was Jolly and easy to get along with. Master Leo Also shared my sarcastic sense of humor, which made me like him even more.

The first two weeks had just been exercises in channeling my energy. I was doing so well he let me pick a skill to use it on. Usually most students picked making a shield or creating energy bolts but I had a different goal in mind. "This is an unusual pick, but would you teach me how to change forms. I always dreamed of flying, it would be cool to be a bird." He answered "You don't know what your asking for, that is a skill usually third year students begin to learn. It takes focus and much practice. While all Guardians have to pass certain tests, this is a skill not all Guardians are proficient at." I bowed my head "If you would allow me to try, I would be most grateful, even if I fail I would like to try anyway." He looked at me considering for a moment. "You must give your word; you will not try to perform this skill without mine or Selar's supervision. You could get hurt or cause harm to others. Do you understand?" "Yes Master Leo, I understand and agree." I responded happily.

One of the most basics skills was the inward look. You close your eyes and see all the parts that make you up. Biology was always one of my favorite classes in school. After I got out of school I continued to read and learn more on many scientific subjects. I might have been that learning that enabled me to pick of this basic technique so quickly. I looked inside and saw my blood flowing, my cells repairing and one by one all the processes that make my body function. I focused my new Guardian energy into enhancing various aspects. Master Leo had me focus my mind toward elongating my arms. They felt like they were rubber. I was able to stretch them out about ten foot. In the next few weeks I practiced altering my body in different ways. My favorite early technique was making my skin hard like a rock. This would come in handy later. Some times master Selar was away on a trip so I stayed in a dorm room at the school. When he wasn't gone I had a room on his ship and I was able to show him what I had learned. He was impressed how quickly I was learning shape changing. He started calling me Chameleon as a nickname.

Week six

On the third day of week six, Scythe came looking for me. He waited until I was walking alone. I was leaving the school grounds. Using only his left hand he grabbed me by the neck and held me up to a wall. He talked low and slow, like he wanted to hold on to every second. "I want to fight you. I'd rather you fight back, not that you could win but it makes it more fun for me. But if I have to, I'll just beat you down to get my kicks." He grabbed for a knife with his right hand. "I've always wanted to see what color Guardian blood is." He said. I told him "I'm not a Guardian yet, just a potential." He laughed "too bad for you." He attempted to slice my arm with the knife. I made my skin just under the surface hard as a rock. I did it just low enough he could cut me and see the blood he wanted to draw. A small amount of blood came out. "Red, I was hoping it'd be a weird color like green or purple" he said disappointed. I smiled and said "Give me a few months of practice and I might be able to mimic a weird tentacle monster with purple blood, just to give you something interesting to see.

He was stunned to silence for a moment. It was obviously not the response he expected. "Sounds interesting, but you would probably die too quickly." He stated sadly. I spoke while I had the chance "Let me ask you something, is there anything I could do that would prevent me from being your enemy?" He let me down from the wall. "Yeah" he said "You can die or quit, either way I'd have another notch on my wall." While I had him talking I might as well go for broke. "You would only be amused for a moment, and then you would be bored again." "Yeah maybe" he said. "I have a challenge for you" I said confidently. "Let me live long enough to get stronger and we can spar in the practice ring. We will slug it out each week if you like." He turned back to me and said "I can do that now, where's the benefit?" I told him "But no one will fight you now will they? They are all afraid of you?" He laughed "For good reason." I stated again "Exactly their no challenge. One day I'm guessing you would like to take on a full-fledged silver Guardian?" Are you kidding, that's on my graduation list of the party games?" He said. "So" I responded "Then give me time to grow. As I get stronger I'll be more of a challenge. More fun for you." He had a look of consideration. "Get permission to meet me in the ring, and I'll think about it." he stated. With that he threw down a smoke bomb and disappeared. I breathed a sigh of relief for today. I had a feeling though I might have just signed my death warrant.

The next day I was called to the school office to see master Celas the dean. Master Selar was in his office with him. I tried to avoid trouble with Scythe, now I was the one in trouble. I did not fear the punishment as much as their disapproval. Master Celas spoke first "I'm guessing you know why your here?" I answered "I would assume it was the incident yesterday." Celas said "Explain yourself." Why couldn't Scythe, just left me alone? I thought. I tried to be diplomatic and now I was going to be raked over the coals. I used my powers outside of class, but only for self defense. I looked straight a head trying to stay calm, but tears were streaming down my face. This was not a good way to start the year off.

"I know I broke the rule about using my abilities without your supervision. I accept whatever punishment you see fit." "But why did you do it?" The dean asked. He could read my mind. Why he would ask that? I answered truthfully "I wanted to keep him from hurting me without provoking the situation further." Celas nodded and stated. "But you let him cut you." I responded with. "He wanted to see the color of my blood. I let him cut just deep enough to satisfy his curiosity. I was hoping I could get though to him after that." Selar nodded "You see, even now, with little training he handles things like a Guardian." That caught me completely off guard. Selar continued "After examining the recording and your memory, I believe you handled your self well. You did not strike at him. You did not use any of your abilities as a weapon. And now when you thought you were in trouble you acted honorably and truthfully. We wanted to examine your memories personally to verify the whole truth. And using your abilities as defense to keep yourself from harm is allowable. But we will show no leniency to using them as a weapon." Selar spoke once more "I sense you wish to ask us something." "Yes" I said "Would you allow me to spar with scythe in the ring. It may be the only way, to get him to leave me alone?" Celas responded "I would have thought you had enough of him for awhile, now you want to slug it out with him?" I Answered "I'd rather not have to fight him at all, but he seems to need a challenge. If I agree to spar with him, I believe it will help my situation. I don't think he's evil, he just needs something to truly challenge his abilities." Selar nodded "He defends his attacker, and still seeks a way to make peace, sounds very Guardian like to me. Go ask Master Leo, if he approves then it is fine with me." With that, the meeting was over. But the challenges had just begun.

Master Leo trainee report

I am allowing the new trainee to take on Scythe. I am concerned he is trying to take on a challenge he cannot yet handle. Scythe is powerful and cunning. If he could be disciplined to work for the Guardian core, certainly he would be a great asset. This will be a good test of Etan's courage and whether Scythe can be tempered.

A change of Identity

Scythe/ Reapers view

The next day after our confrontation I was warming up on the grounds. It had been a while since anyone would fight me. Twenty practice bots were lined up in rows of five. I grabbed my twin Seraka blades for this occasion. They were curved blades that when held arched out and back toward the user's arms. They went well with my jumping and swinging style of fighting. Just in time Mr. Grey God showed up to watch. "Here to see how you're going to die one day are you?" I asked. He didn't answer; he just sat there watching me instead. I decided to do a fun move I hadn't done in a while, it would take the bots out too quickly but was it bound to scare the old Grey God. I attacked the rows of bots straight on swinging both blades. Their heads made a pleasing thudding sound as they hit the ground. I looked back after I had taken them all out; the new kid was thoroughly impressed. "Very nice, you mowed them down just like a Reaper" he said. I didn't know what that term meant, but it sounded good. "What's a Reaper?" I asked. He laughed "It has two meanings. One meaning is a person with a blade on a long handle that gathers a crop for harvest." Then he made a sweeping motion with his hands to demonstrate "and" he continued "The other is a mythical figure of death that carries the same instrument for harvesting souls." he said. "Hmm death and coming judgment, I like it." I said. I looked at my lackey who followed me around doing my bidding. "Go and tell everyone you see, my new name is Reaper, I will not be known as Scythe anymore." He quickly ran off.

"I like it, but I'm still going to kill you one day." I told him. "I thought we were past the whole killing thing" he responded. "No, it just buys you time in school, when you graduate I'll kill you then. But since you gave me a good idea, I might take you out quickly and mercifully, or not depending on my mood at the time." I told him with confidence. "You're such a humanitarian." he said smiling. An hour later it was time for the sparring. I let the word out that I had a new target. Nearly half the school was there to watch. I'll have to find out later which half did not show, so I could deal with them. I am Reaper. Yes I like the sound of that. Guardian Leo and two medics were present. Smart move, he'll need them but he probably should have brought more. The announcer walked in the ring telling that the new Guardian trainee would battle Scythe. I quickly corrected him. I let the new guy go in the ring first since he was the challenger, not that he would be a challenge. He looked nervous, good very good.

Master Selar and one other Regent's named Ridged, Ridal or whatever was present for the fight. The more people that were here, the better my reputation gets. Since I didn't get an audience like this often, I decided to put extra showmanship into it. I strutted around the ring and let their adoration come to me. The announcer proudly announced that the champion fighter would be taking on the new comer Etan. So that's what his name was. Sounds like some kind of fruit to me. That was a dumb name but what do I care. These were the moments I lived for. I walked up to him and opened my arms wide and loudly announced "I give my esteemed opponent the first strike. Hit me, if you can." A little over the top, I know but it seemed to be effective. The crowd laughed and cheered, all except The Guardian teachers and the two Regents. Master Selar gave me a disapproving look. He knew I was just stroking my ego. Sadly my prey did not take the bait. He shook his head and backed away, then took a fighting stance. Ok Reaper. I said to myself, not so quickly. Can't finish him too soon or there will be nothing to watch on the recording later. I tried out an easy move first. See how he responds. I tried a simple leg sweep, to attempt to unbalance him, and make him fall to the ground. I would be very disappointed if this worked. Fortunately he was able to avoid this move and remain on his feet. He continued to move around the ring in relation to mine. I wish he would try to strike me. Do I have to do the whole fight by myself? There's an idea, make a hologram version of me to fight. That would be funny, fighting a fake version of myself. I could scare myself, he-he. I wonder what I would do if I ever encountered a copy of me?

I noticed most people's eyes were on him rather than me now. They were waiting to see what he would do back. Even Master Selar was watching his student rather than me. I needed a little flare to get things going. I jumped up and flipped over his head. I planned to do a move that would cut off the circulation to his head, He would pass out then I would

wait until he wakes up to continue the fight. That way everyone could see I had already won. Everything else would be just toying with him. I grabbed his neck and began to apply pressure. He changed to rubber and his head swung around backwards. His arms and legs followed along with his torso. Now I was essentially hugging him. He smiled and said loudly "I didn't know you cared." The crowd roared with laughter. He continued his rubber move by wrapping his arms and legs around me, like he was a rope. The crowd began to cheer for him now shouting "Etan, Etan, Etan." I had a trick for this; I dislocated my right shoulder and slipped out. Then walked over to the post of the ring and slammed in back into place. There was a loud awe, sound from the crowd; they knew what I was doing.

Selar gave Etan an approving nod during his last move. I was starting to get a little aggravated, no one and I mean no one takes my glory. I walked back over and grabbed him by the head and flipped his body onto the floor. That worked fairly well, he was stunned for a moment. Then I put my left knee on his chest and began to lay into his face with hard punches. After the third hit he changed his face to rock. I lowered the knuckle bar on my gauntlets and continued to pound him. Then he did a sneaky move to me next. He made his legs rubber and used them to wrap around my neck choking me. I had choked plenty of people in the past but I had never been choked by anyone, it was an interesting sensation. I wondered if I was turning blue.

As fascinating as this sensation was, I couldn't let it go any further. I stopped hitting him and pried the rubber legs from my neck and whispered in his ear "You've done better than I thought, but now I've got to take you out, you're making me look bad." He focused on me and said "Does the painting or the artist make the work look bad" I growled. "What does that mean?" Selar spoke up. "Good one Etan" Grrr, Even Selar was against me now. "It means, you made yourself look bad" Etan responded. "That's it rubber boy, no mercy for you" I told him. Given what I had seen him do so far I had a feeling how I could set him up for a big loose.

I let lose a barrage of fast hitting hard punches in his chest. Just as I thought first he became like rubber and my hand sunk into his chest, then he solidified his chest, trapping my hand. That's just what I wanted him to do. I placed my right foot on his chest and pulled hard. My hand came out with an explosion. A gaping hole was left in what remained of his chest. He had a surprised look on his face as he stared at the hole. He didn't even have time for a smart remark before he collapsed. The announcer was still in shock, over the damage. He announced I was the winner, and backed away from me. The crowd applauded but it wasn't the same as when I entered. This fight was over, but the war had just begun.

Sparing fan's view

Man that was brutal. I've never seen anyone's chest ripped apart like that. I hope the new guy will be ok. That Reaper guy is scary. You couldn't pay enough money to spar with him. I hope when he graduates he is on our side.

Hard hit recovery

Etans comments

Dang that last hit hurt. The punches in the face were bad but not as much as getting my chest torn out. Master Selar entered the room and said "That was impressive, I'm proud of you." I was a bit dazed did he say he was proud of me "what do you mean, I lost badly." He looked at me and said "Not as badly as you think. You lasted three minutes; no other student has made it past thirty seconds. He would be a challenge for an experienced trainee. And I can tell you, you surprised him. He won't underestimate you again. I saw in his mind, he is jealous because you won the crowd over to you. You earned a lot of respect with the student body today. You're their new hero." I laughed "I don't feel much like a hero, more like hero sandwich maybe. One left in the sun about a week and squished flat." He laughed "Etan you're a riot." Just then Reaper walked in, obviously quit proud of himself. "Hi there pebbles, glad to see you up and around" Calling me pebbles was a poke on how I got busted up. Selar looked at him sternly. "You've had your win for today. What do you want?" "I came to check on my new moving target. I wanted to make sure I didn't break him too much." Selar reprimanded him "You came to gloat, brag all you want but don't bother him while he is recovering. Your victory wasn't as easy as you would like to think it was. Trapping your hand in his chest was a tactical error, on his part but he won't make that mistake again. And don't forget he will soon have many more abilities than rubber and stone."

I looked at reaper and bravely stated "Congratulations on the fight, your amazing." Selar directed a look toward me "well said Etan, a Guardian style response. Reaper, you could learn a thing or two from our new Guardian here." He

called me a new Guardian rather than a trainee or cadet, probably to jab Reapers ego. Reaper gave him a mean stare and said. "He is not a Guardian yet, and yes I know I'm great, I'm Reaper." Selar ignored that and patted me on the shoulder and said he would come back and check on me later. Reaper looked at me "So when do you think, you'll be ready to get your butt kicked again?" I tried to look unconcerned "Give me a few days to recover and I'll get back to you." Reaper patted me on the shoulder trying to copy Selar "Well pebbles, you were a good work out, see you next week." Then he turned around and strutted out. I was glad to see him leave. Argyle came to see me too. He stayed and talked for awhile.

The next few days I was sore, but I made it to all my classes. I had several people congratulate me and shake my hand. I was invited to dinner by several students and Master Leo. Surprisingly Master Selar was not against it. I figured he would say it would be prideful or something. Master Leo and I discussed other changes I could begin learning. He said he had never seen any student learn form change this quickly. The next day people stared at me throughout my classes, and looked at me like I was a rock star. I tried to keep up a brave face. I politely said thank you to all the complements and praise. I was warned by several teachers not to let such adulation go to my head. The truth was I didn't feel like a hero at all.

The day after that there were a few banners up, saying congratulations Etan our newest Guardian. I didn't win why were they praising me like I did win? Reaper walked by as I was musing on this. "I bet you think this is great, everyone is bragging on you, even though you lost in the ring." I looked at him seriously "Actually I'm not sure what it's all about either." He huffed "Yeah right, just watch your back, all bets are off." I tried one more time. "why can't we be friends, I respect your skills. All the other students are afraid of you, but you don't have any friends." Reaper growled "I don't need friends." That sounded empty to me, so I said. "Then I feel bad for you. You're going to have a lonely life. Even success will feel as empty as defeat." He got in my face "You don't know me. But each week, I guaranty you will know pain. I took it easy on you the first time, but from now on you will only know fear and defeat."

The next week of school I made sure I had plenty of chores to do when the time came for sparing. Many people were pumped up to see another match. After missing the first match no one said anything, but the second week I missed it people began whispering about me. None of the teachers taught me mind reading yet, but occasionally I picked up stray thoughts from people. By the end of the second week missed, all the banners came down and only a few people talked to me. Hopefully I can get back to what I came here to learn. That evening Master Selar sat me down for a talk. "If you didn't wish to fight you should not have started this." I knew he was right "Yeah I know, I was hoping to get through to him, maybe become his friend." He comforted me "It may not seem like it, but you have made progress with him. But to quit now, is a mistake. You are afraid to fight and I understand why. But you must overcome fear if you are to continue to grow. Congratulations, by the way on beginning to pick up peoples thoughts now." Nothing ever surprised master Selar. I hope I can be that wise one day.

Matts comments

At this point Etan was afraid. It wasn't as much about getting hurt as being a failure. Many people quit activities because their afraid to fail.

Etan view continued

Later on Argyle came to see me. He asked "what is it that you want from the fight?" I didn't understand. "To win I guess." I said. "Are you sure?" He asked "Isn't it more like not letting him hurt you? Because if that's so, that's not the same as being able to hurt him. Let me ask you this. If your match is a draw isn't it really losing for him?" I was astounded "Yes, I don't have to win. A draw is like losing for him. Thanks bud. That gives me an idea." He smiled "I'm here for you anytime." He was always so calm and wise. The next week I had a message placed in the school telecast that in two weeks I would fight Reaper again. I had an idea of something that could help me in the next match but I needed time to practice. The school seemed lively again as people anticipated the excitement to come. They wouldn't be nearly as excited if they had to fight him. I continued to train with Master Leo in preparation for the next match. I heard that when Reaper got the telecast he went straight to his room to sharpen his blades.

Mater Leo's report

Etan is doing well. He has showed great courage, wisdom and humility. It would be easy for him to have gotten prideful after his first match with so many people lifting him up. He was afraid to fight the Reaper child again, but shortly afterwards he overcame his fear. Reaper whose real name is Drax has not missed a single class since the first match. He also has stopped harassing the other students. If he had continued to cause trouble this year like he did last year, I was going to suggest his expulsion. I find it amazing that a young trainee like Etan could have such a radical effect on a wild child as Drax. I am looking forward to the next match; Reaper will have a surprise this time.

A diamond in the rough.

All too soon enough the day came. I was terrified. I had been training a new form change that could help my fight, but success was in no way assured. I entered the ring, and got modest applause, I guess most people had lost confidence in me, but I wasn't here for them. Reaper entered with all the pomp he could gather. He had four trumpeters and twelve banner wavers. I don't know where the confetti came from but that seemed to be a little much. The announcer had a long and ceremonious introduction for him. He loudly stated "Ladies and gentlemen, make noise for your champion the dark king of the ring, the Guardian slayer himself, our very own Reaper." Loud cheering and applause filled the room. I slowed my breathing and concentrated. I tried to tune everything else out but me and him. This time he carried the dual swords I had seen before. He tossed two more bladed weapons at me, but I declined. He seemed unaffected by my refusal. He was planning carnage either way it seems. I could feel his hate like the heat of bonfire.

He walked up to me. He didn't even bothering to defend himself. He swung both blades similarly as when he was practicing with the bots. I immediately employed a new skill. I made springs of my legs and bounced out of the way. This got a quick laugh from the crowd. Reaper gave them a glance and the whole room went silent. A couple more tries like that and he was steaming. I glanced at Master Selar, who was showing no reaction. Though I was in a crowd I felt completely alone. "You can't hop all night, spring man, one good swipe and your mine." Reaper said. "You've got to get me first." I replied. "You can't touch me, while avoiding me." he stated. I leapt over his head as he swung and said "I don't have to do anything to you. An even match is a win for me. You have to win to keep your honor; all I have to do is not lose. It's not the same." I told him with confidence now. After four more minutes of this he showed no sign of slowing, and he was right about one thing I couldn't keep this up all night. I made one final leap to the opposite side of the ring. I got the chance to glance around, the crowd looked bored. Good, maybe this will cut out their blood lust next time. Reaper saw the look in my eyes that said I'm not moving from this spot. I turned into rock and stood straight up with my arms crossed. He put his blades together and shook them and they became a large hammer. This was unexpected but I would stick to the plan. "You thought last time hurt, watch this." Reaper said with glee. He swung wide and put all his strength into it. At the last second I changed into smooth diamond skin. His hammer bounced back hitting him in the nose and drew blood. The crowd gasped. No one had ever drawn his blood. Technically he did it to himself, but I had caused it. I jabbed him a bit with cutting remark "I see your blood is red too, what a shame, I was hoping it would be green or purple."

He stopped for just second then said "That trick won't save you either." He taped a button on his gauntlets and they became lined with a metallic substance. He grabbed my neck and squeezed. I could feel the pressure. It would take awhile but eventually he could crack my diamond skin, time for phase three. I went from smooth skin to diamond spikes all over. I punctured his chest, arms and legs. He cringed slightly for a second. "I can take lots of pain. You'll have to do better, that barely tickles." This guy was tough alright but causing him pain wasn't the point of what I had done. While he was stuck to me, I turned both my hands into diamond blades and cut off his arms. Then I swiped down to cut of his legs. That just left him a stump. He screamed with rage. I retracted the spikes and let his torso fall to the ground. The crowd roared with cheers. He concentrated on his limbs and they rolled back to him. They slowly reattached themselves. How could he do that? How many abilities did he have? By the time he was whole again the match was called a draw. Reaper looked at me with absolute rage. I asked for the microphone. I spoke slowly and clearly "After the first match you cheered for me. Then when I didn't want to fight again, many you called me a coward. I'm no coward but I didn't come here to learn how to slaughter people. I came here to learn to be a Guardian, a keeper of peace and upholder of life not death." I got in Reapers face. "I am not afraid of you. But I will not waste anymore time on this activity. If all you know is violence then the problem is yours not mine." Master Selar nodded his approval and sent me a mental message "well said" That night I had a peaceful sleep.

Matt comments

I wish I could have been with Etan on this one. I just had to watch from afar and wait until my time came. This was his first real heroic thing he did as a Guardian trainee, all because he did not give up.

Sparing fan's view

That was way cool! He should call that the diamond cutter move. I was disappointed that he wouldn't be fighting anymore, but I understand his reasons. Who knows after he gets better he will spar with Reaper again.

Never give up your prey

Reapers view

One more minute, that's all I needed was one more minute to finish him off. He spent most of the sparing time leaping around like some kind of prairie rabbit. That was probably his plan all along. It was cunning of him to use his body as a weapon, almost a move I would have made. Even when the announcer was saying the time limit was up, ideas flooded to my head on how to compensate for this new skill. Then he ruined everything by saying he wouldn't fight anymore. He claimed it was for higher purposes, but really he was afraid of me. He knew he couldn't beat me long term. Even in this last match all he did was delay me. I couldn't go back to being bored each week. This will not do at all. Etan was the first person to give me a modest challenge in a long time. I couldn't get through the rest of school without challenges. I decided to go find that coward and give him my demands face to face. The next day I found him in the gym leading a group of students in meditation. I recognized the techniques he was doing as the same ones that Master Selar had tried to teach me. I approached him, but his eyes were still closed. I'm sure he heard me coming and was trying to ignore me. I kicked him in the knee and said "Hey pebbles, wake up. We need to talk." He opened his eyes and said "My name is Etan." I decided to play along for a moment to get him talking. "Well then, Mr. high and mighty Etan, how are you doing?" He seemed amused by my sarcasm. "And what can I do for the dark king of the ring today?" He replied in the same tone. "You know what I want. I want you to continue sparing with me." I told him sternly. "No" he said and closed his eyes again.

I don't take no for an answer. "Just so you know I never give up the hunt. I will hound you everyday until you say yes. Night and day I'll follow you around. I'll be like your shadow. At lunch, in class, and in your room at night, I'll be there annoying you. You will see me all day, everyday of your life until you graduate." He stood up and faced me. I finally had his attention. Then he excused himself from the group and walked away. He wasn't getting away that easy. I followed him talking in his ear the whole time. "Come on pebbles, you've got to be at least tempted by the challenge." I told him. He turned to look at me "A challenge yes, but not your way." Ahh so he did have a price. I had him on the hook; I just had to reel him in. I called his bluff. "So what way then, name the stakes, I'm game." He looked me in the eyes and said "Meet me in the sparing room in half an hour and we'll talk." What stakes could he want? Maybe he wanted less time with me in ring per round, or to give me some handy cap to give him the advantage. I didn't matter what; I had to get him back in the ring one way or the other. I had plenty of other moves I hadn't got to try out on a live target. Bots were ok to warm up on, but it wasn't the same as a live opponent. I lived for the fight.

When I walked in the sparing room he had Master Selar and Leo standing with him. Oh great, they were probably going to take away my enhanced speed and strength just so their boy wouldn't look so bad. "I have them here for a witness only," Etan said. He must have read my mind. I hate Guardians, all of them. He looked at me and said "Barring my duties, or training I'll spar with you as much as I can. I should have time at least once week. I will do this under one condition. It is my only and final offer take it or leave it. I don't care either way." I wasn't letting this opportunity go to waste. Even without my speed and strength enhancements, I could beat him just using pure skill and determination. He has no idea just how dangerous I can be. What he saw in the ring was only a small sample. I was holding myself back so the match wouldn't end too quickly.

"Ok half-god what's your price?" I asked. He smiled at me in that annoying way he has and said "I won't spar with you as an enemy, but only as a friend." What? That's not a stipulation, and that doesn't even make sense. "I don't need

friends” I told him. Master Selar spoke “You can agree to his proposal or you can leave him alone from this moment on. If you bother him even one time after this, I’ll wipe out all the skills you’ve learned, and take away every enhancement you have. And leave you with just enough memory to remember who you used to be. You’ll spend the rest of your life scrubbing floors in a trash pod.” I’ve had known Master Selar for many years he has never made an empty threat or promise.

“I told you, I don’t need friends, I just like to fight.” I said again. Etan and the two Guardians turned toward the door. “Wait. What do you mean friend?” I asked. Maybe I could still define the terms. Etan turned back towards me and said “It means no fanfare, no crowds, just you and me in a ring. It also means if I say I yield, you have to stop.” I considered that. Crowds were fun, but it was the fight I lived for. “How do I know you’ll really try to fight?” I asked. If he didn’t try very hard, it wouldn’t be fun anyway. Etan stated “I give you my word; I’ll always do my best.” Hmm maybe. “But if you say yield, I’ve got to stop?” Etan looked at me very serious. “I think you’ll find me a greater challenge than you expect. My abilities will continue to grow. The more abilities I get the harder I will be to beat, but while I’m learning I need to know I have a safety net.” he said. Maybe it could work I thought. I told him “I guess I’ll try it.” He patted me on the shoulder in much the same way I done to him in medical ward and said “Well then I guess I see you here tomorrow afternoon buddy.” With that he turned around and left out talking with the two Master Guardians.

Etans comments

As I figured Reaper wouldn’t give up sparing. I was thinking about this since our second fight. It wasn’t sparing that was bad but that we had to be enemies. He obviously knew a great deal about combat; no doubt he could teach me much. But I had no desire to live off of hate and adrenaline. When he approached me in the gym, I knew what I had to do. I needed to act before he got desperate enough to do something outrageous. Master Selar said he would support me on what I wanted to do. I told him I would only fight him under one condition. He of course would think that meant some kind of handicap for him. Reaper walked in the gym and had a disgusted look on his face. He obviously thought that Master Selar was there to force him to meet my demands. I had Master Selar there only as a witness to any agreement we made. In the end Reaper did reluctantly agree to my condition.

Dark Swarm Regents report

Stage three is almost complete. The incursion will be ready to commence in a less than ninety days. Calculations show that when all five Guardian leaders are eliminated, the rest of galaxy will fall in less than six months. The queen has assured us that resistance from the blue levels will be nominal at best. Project doorway has been moved to its new location and is well on its way to completion.

Matt's comments

At this point the Guardian leaders knew something big was happening but was unable to pin point the source.

Ups and downs

The next four months came and went. By now Etan could see the active thoughts in most people’s minds. All except Reaper, somehow he seemed to be able to block him. He could usually read his feelings though. At first Reaper was sullen, thinking he wouldn’t try very hard in the ring. But after the first time, he realized Etan would still be a challenge, he lightened up. Well as much as a guy named Reaper could lighten up anyway. Etan had an idea of what might win Reaper over a little more. Etan pulled up all the earth files on the Grimm Reaper figure from earth. With Selar’s permission he replicated a black cloak and Scythe. The Scythe could be turned into a regular bladed sword. The black cloak contained a cloaking field. When Etan showed Reaper the files he was entranced. He read the material for hours. It was the first time he had ever seen Reaper that still. Reaper took to the Cloak and Scythe like he had owned them for years. He looked at Etan and said with a slight smile “I might not have to kill you after all.” That became their running joke for years to come. Reaper constantly threatened to kill him later but over time they did become friends. Most weeks in the ring, Etan had to yield but a few times they matched even. Then the next week Reaper would win again. No matter what Etan learned Reaper seemed to have some way to counter it. After he would win a match, Reaper showed Etan his moves again and what he could have done to defend against it. Etan was amazed how much Reaper knew.

Etans comments

I continued to grow in skills, but I hadn't yet mastered changing my form all the way. Reaper walked in one day when I was practicing to become a bird. I looked more like a bird man mutant. He called me the chicken man. He took a picture and spread it around school. For the next few weeks as I walked through the hall, people would pass me by and flap their arms and make bird or chicken sounds. Reaper said if he had my power he'd like to turn into a disease and infect a whole planet. He would. Just as the chicken man was starting wear off, Reaper set up a bucket up of tar and dumped it on me then a large bag of feathers and said "Here, maybe this will help." Like the old saying goes, with friends like this who needs enemies. He had several people there taking pictures. Trying to get back at him would be un-Guardian like, but I did need a way to teach him a lesson.

I challenged Reaper to fight me using only his Cloak and Scythe. He was happy to oblige this request. He still looked very creepy in it. He had changed its cloaking field to project a skull where his face should be, so he would match the Reaper image from earth. He stepped in the sparing room and it was filled with just over a hundred students. I had told them we had a very special fight coming up. He came dressed in the cloak that I gave him. I was the one who replicated the cloak so I knew how it worked. I taped into the computer codes that controlled its cloaking field. I had to tell Master Selar what I wanted to do, to make sure I didn't get in trouble. He smiled shook and his head but didn't object. Reaper began by walking around in a circle in the ring with his eyes glued to me. He knew I was up to something but didn't know what.

The crowd was impressed, apparently this was the first time they had seen him in this garb. He pulled out his Scythe and held it up for all to see. He loudly announced "I am Reaper, fear me" This was too perfect. I taped a button on my computer gauntlet that I had made. It preformed a preset program. The field kicked in on his cloak making only it disappear and leaving him in his underwear. It also projected a hologram on his underwear so they looked pink. The placed echoed with laughter. He looked down and actually blushed for a second. He knew I had gotten him good this time. "Well played" he said. Then he threw down a smoke bomb and was gone. It was along time before he tried anything else. No one else messed with me as the chicken man for awhile either. This day was mine.

Dark swarm orders

Begin all incursion protocols in four hours. Project doorway techs, must evacuate the base before the start up procedures. After the initial drop off, the infestation division must report back to command hub for new shipments. If secondary protocols are ordered, all divisions except Black Death must report to the fleet deployment location for ship assignments. All ship captains stand by for armada deployment.

Between a rock and hard place.

Etan's comments

Six months into school and I was still training hard. Master Selar was ready to take me on a rescue mission. I asked if Reaper could come along. I figured he would like to get away from the school for awhile. By this time I found out his true name was Drax, but I was only allowed to use his name when we were alone. "Hey Drax, want get off planet for awhile." I asked. "It depends on where we're going pebbles" He responded. We were kind of friends now but Drax still like to poke fun at me. "It's not where, but what were doing that counts. All I know is its some kind of rescue mission. If someone needs rescuing there could be some fighting." He shrugged. "Yeah, ok there's no practice bots left to kill right now anyway." He responded. I decided to mess with him a bit "Well saddle up pink panties" Were leaving in half an hour" Reaper pulled out his Scythe held it to my neck and said "Call me that again, I dare you" I laughed and said "I will later, when your at a distance." Reaper had to laugh at that too. He couldn't believe he would ever, have thought of anyone as a friend.

We traveled with Master Selar to a planet under siege. To my surprise, Argyle came along too. The people were a peaceful agricultural based society. The problem was an aggressive foe had sent a plague of locust like bugs to wipe out their crops. Master Selar had me watch very carefully what he would do next. He left the ship and flew down to the ground. He created a massive compression wave that took out the entire swarm at once. Considering the swarm covered nearly one hundred square kilometers it was quit amazing. Even Reaper seemed impressed by this. I looked at Reaper and said "That was cool, but I saw a file where he had to take out five thousand soldiers at one time." Reaper looked to

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