

*Here's a bit of advice you'll get from me about having kids in this line of work: don't.*

*Take it from me. You'll fuck up their life. They'll fuck up yours. No one ends up happy.*

*Being a legendary squire or some nova-hot Necro? Some Godclad with impossible power? That shits just for your enemies and allies. With family, it's just an anvil around you neck. There's no normal life to be had if you want to be in the snuff-game.*

*None.*

-Quail Tavers when asked about children

27-7

Shaped by Another

**-[Eurun]-**

It felt like waking up after being drowned.

For hours, months, years, Eurun floated in the dark, unable to focus, unable to stay tethered to himself or any of his memories. Everything came in broken instances: Shapes, sensations, then gone.

Afterward, he was in the deep again, waiting for a moment to surface.

Sometimes, there would be a period in which he would be aware of himself—sense his surroundings, feel the fluid touching his skin. He struggled to hold on during those times, but the waves always pulled him under as soon as he lost focus. Then he lost who he was again.

He thought today was going to be another one of those moments. But there was something different; someone else was in his mind with him. Someone else that reconnected all the recollections he could, someone wrapping him in struggle, keeping him leashed to awareness.

The first memory that came back to him was his earliest, when he was just a child, watching the aratnids spill through the roof into his playpen. He would never forget that, never, not unless every bit of him was destroyed.

From there, his memories jumped. He was in a crashing aero, aiming for a Syndicate transport; he was gunning down enforcers in mid-air, diving after them as burning transports fell from the sky; he was torturing a man to impress some of his consangs, trying not to throw up as his victim screamed and begged. He was coughing blood and limping away from the circuits, his shiv buried in the throat of an unmoving Scaarthian.

In all these memories, he heard the skittering of the aratnids. They were taunting him. The little bastards were there, like vermin spread across his entire life. Everything he did, he did to live up to that moment, to kill the little fuckers before they took his world, before they took his mother's respect for him.

It took a hell of a lot to be a worthy son to one Quail Tavers.

Tavers. His mother. She was here. He knew that somehow. Close enough that he could sense her. He knew she was watching him. She didn't look aged, but something about her eyes made her seem older. He knew that look...

Oh, gods. Not again. Once again, mom had to clean up his mess. Stupid Eurun, idiot Eurun, just-like-his-dad, Eurun. His thoughts were beginning to flow coherently. He remembered all his attempts to impress his mother, to being a squire like her: killing random street toughs, going after Syndicates and Fallwalkers. Anything to prove himself worthy of the name.

The little aratnids he could handle. But she was still getting the big ones. Still doing all the actual work.

So, he ended up joining the circuits to earn a name. He fought in the Blood Games, and got called Eurun the Eradicator for a time. Chainsaw helmet for intimidation and showmanship. High-end bio-augs. Not a hint of chrome on his skin. No one expects to be torn apart by the flat until their skin unlatches and the Sang-shit comes out.

He killed a lot of people during those days. Most of them deserved it, some just didn't have anyplace better to be. But the circuits gave him a way out, the circuits gave him purpose, and focus, and eventually, a Frame. The Fallwalker who faced him that day in Hseagyr thought they had him. They were a Godclad, and he was an ephemeral. But death comes with every mistake, with every slip and instance of overconfidence. They didn't manage to kill him fast enough with their flames, and didn't take him seriously enough to manifest. They died first, he followed, and what ended was one of the most high profile usurpations recorded on the Nether.

That caught the attention of a Highflame Guilder, and they got in touch with him. Said they were interested in potentially brining him in. He thought they wanted to make him a full citizen—an Instrument or something. He drank himself to death three times celebrating right after he finished the cast, but then he spoke to mom, and all he got from her was anger.

Stupid Eurun, idiot Eurun, just-like-your-father Eurun.

*"I didn't burn my life doing runs so you could go sell yourself to the Guilds and be their dog,"* she said, more livid than he ever remembered her being. All his life, he just wanted to make her proud, to carry the weight of her legend and shadow. But in the end, he was just Eurun—his father's son. And that was a bit too much for him to take.

He said things to her afterward. Shit he couldn't remember, but hurt all the same. He asked her why she wanted to be a moment when she liked holding guns more than him or his brothers. What's the point of having kids if she just wanted to be a squire?

He asked if it was because she wanted her own dogs? People who would believe in her and follow her no matter what—and wouldn't leave her like dad did?

She hit him. He ran. She cast. He didn't answer; he took the Guilder's gig out of spite. And that ended up being the last mistake he could remember.

Thing was, Highflame wasn't looking to recruit some new Godclad, but were finding useful dying meat for an upcoming raid on an Ori-Thaum embassy. Something deniable, with someone disposable. They found that in Eurun and a few other Fallwalkers. They got together like they were a cadre, and got all amped about how many thaums they were going to claim that day. But they were compromised before their run even began.

The others died seconds after the fighting started. Eurun managed to keep himself from getting nulled through their subverted intelligence assets thanks to the wards he kept inside his mind as well. But that only kept him alive for a bit. Crawling out of his downed transport, he saw nukes hammer down against the Ori's forces, but they were ready for it. Just as they were paranoid enough to have their own cadre in reserve.

Highflame's actual assault cadres came a minute later, and Eurun tried to join them, thinking that he was going to distinguish himself somehow. But again, the skittering sounded in his head.

*It was his role to get the little ones. The little ones. Leave the big ones to mom.*

Because he was a little aratnid. Because he wasn't a legend, and never had it in him. He didn't fall in some mythical last stand; he was at fifty percent Rend with two golems melted by his fires when a layer of reality fell down from the sky and buried him in an ocean thereafter.

Death came immediately after, and when Eurun crossed over, not all of him came back after the resurrection.

**-[Avo]-**

*+Holy shit,+ Shotin's actual self muttered, reviewing the memories Avo sent. +I remember this guy. Yeah. The Incubi said there was a hit coming in on my bond-brother, and I ended up joining in on the fun to ruin the Gold's day. This juv was screaming his head off, blasting people with fire near the front door of the embassy when I stacked him with my Parallelist. Fuck. Didn't know he was Tavers' son.+*

**+Small city,+** Avo deadpanned. As he stitched a few final sequences back together, Eurun's thoughtstuff began to flow smooth across the channels of his mind. All that was needed now was some time to adjust, and the mind should be stable.

Avo's Definements worked perfectly for this task. Ignorance whispered to him details he was missing—things that were hard to find. Delusion allowed him to reshape and form what was lost in Eurun; Hysteria filtered the intensity of moments and specific sequences, separating the pillars from the supports. And then there was Pre-Cognition. For all that was utterly destroyed by entropy, Avo rebuilt by simulating all the variables he did know in his Soulscape. Entire battles, relationships, adventures were reformed based on recreations of time and concept.

What Eurun would soon recall might not be the exact truth of his life, but it was close enough to bridge all his sequences together with any hint of insanity. The ego was stable; the mind perceived, believed, and became.

Despite this, Pre-Cognition was still heavy on the Rend, despite the simulations being entire mem-data sourced.

#### **REND CAPACITY - 45%**

Time was a vulgar, vulgar thing to wield.

*+Hello?+ Eurun's voice came low and surprised, but Avo didn't respond immediately. He watched the man's thoughtstuff come forth from the depths of his cognition. Stable. Steady. Good. Very good. +I—I can feel you here. Here with me. Why—hard to see. My head hurts. Feels like I just... crawled out of a pit.+*

Avo pulled his remaining Splinters away and chuffed with low satisfaction. **+Not unexpected. Your ego was broken. Close to coming apart entirely. Will take you a moment to feel normal again.+**

*+But I'm going to? Get back to normal?+*

**+Yes.+**

*+And I got you to thank for mending me, huh?+*

**+My efforts in the end. But your mother never stopped searching for help. To restore you.+**

Several emotions sprang free from Eurun. Embarrassment.. Shame. Self-directed rage. And weakness. *+She always has to do this... always helping me fix my fuck-ups. Is... is she out there right now? Just looking at me?+*

**+Yes,** Avo replied.

*+Fuck. You know, I spent so long... trying to get my mind back and wake up, but hearing that... I kinda want to go under again.+*

How very amusing. Humans put so much of themselves in their own efforts, actions, creations, and words, and used them to find connections with another. They shaped each other as they shaped themselves, desiring unity and individuality at the same time, community defining people; people defining community. The urge for a tribe was a weakness, strength, and raw culture in its operations.

Human. What a thing to be.

**+You are trapped in a shadow, Eurun.** Avo said, speaking plainly. **+Saw your life. Saw you. Understand you. Going to keep a piece of you with me forever.** The man just listened as he spoke. **+Your not suited for being a squire. Not as you are right now. You are leashed to a pointed in time. You don't live in the world. You exist in your mind—try to force the world to feed your insecurities. Fears. It's why you hesitate.+**

*+Yeah,* Eurun sighed, already aware. *+But what am I supposed to do? Just... let her legend crush me? Just be the idiot like my dad was while mom does all the important shit.+*

**+Your mother is not perfect. Her failings with your father do not belong to you. Marked you maybe. Don't belong to you. Her shadow isn't her legend. Her shadow is everything that she is. Everything she expects of you. Everything you believe she expects of you.** A beat followed. **+You are not without talent. Can fight. Can fight well. Good up close. Good when things get chaotic. Brave. But this isn't enough.+**

*+Nope.* Eurun agreed, thinking on all his mistakes. *+I freeze up too much. Make the wrong choices.+*

**+Because you don't face the problem. You imagine yourself to be your mother. Then you try to solve things as a poor imitation of her. It's why you tortured that man. Wanted to be hard. Unfeeling. Nove-hot and ice-cold at the same time. But you don't have it. You don't have the wrongness needed for the Warrens.+**

The man's thoughtstuff stuttered. *+Wait, you're saying I'm not a good squire because I'm mentally stable?+*

**+I'm saying you are shaped properly for a human. Tavers raised you well. Gave you a good life. Most people don't have that. You are a whole person playing pretend with emotional cripples. And so you tear yourself to fit in.+**

+...Jaus, consang, can you give a guy a moment to get his shit together before you start blasting him emotionally.+

**+Not my intent. But going to tell you plainly because you have a chance at life. City has enough killers. Squires. Can run with them. Won't be them. Not unless your mind is reshaped. But your mother won't want that. Don't think you do now either.+**

Eurun sighed. *+But what else am I good for?+*

Humanity was ridiculous. All the colors in front of them, and they claim there are none. **+Go do something else. Find out. Can still be a warrior. Never told you to stop that. But hired killer? A hunter of other people? No. Not in you.+**

*+You know, all my life, I just... wanted to live up to mom. Be the one to kill the big aratnids too. She was the one that saved Naeko in the end. You saw that, right? The moment where she got my doll back for me?+*

**+I did,+** Avo replied.

Eurun sighed. *+Fucking useless. Just like my dad.+* A near-trauma pulsed inside him, turning into a dull ache. *+All I could think about the Chief Paladin would have been embarrassed to see me. Couldn't even be brave enough—+*

**+He would have told you to not be like him.+** Avo said. **+That is the truth.+**

Eurun was silent once again.

**+You're going to awaken soon. Ego is restored. In perfect condition. Mother is waiting. Life is waiting. Going to leave you now. Should talk to her. Face her. Face your thoughts. Don't let them just live in your head. Shape them before they shape you.+**

A full template of Eurun's ego formed then, and Avo began to recede.

*+Wait!+* Eurun called out. *+Who are you? Why'd you do this?+*

**+I am merely will ascending,+** Avo said. **+You will know my name soon enough. Did this for Tavers. It is not a favor. Not nearly enough to make up for how she aided me.+**

*+Yeah,+* Eurun said, mind a mix of sour and proud. *+That's mom.+*

**+Worried and tired. That is also mom. You are not alone under the shadow of her legend. Talk. Live. Stop wandering blind.+**

And then Avo drew himself out from the man's mind, and gave a final cast to New Vultun's finest squire.

**+It's done. He'll be with you soon.+**

+...Thanks, consang,+ Tavers said.

**+Thank me by being honest with him.+**

He left before she could waste a response on him

**-[Eurun]-**

And then lights as Eurun's eyes opened, and he found himself hovering in a cage of water. He paddled for a moment, kicked as he saw his mother. She reacted, breaking from her folded arm posture as she took a step forward. Her mouth dropped open, her eyes were wide, head whipping about. Frantic. He hadn't seen her like that in years...

A dull thrumming pulsed against his skin; he heard a suckling noise coming around him as the water level began to drop. The fluid cupping his body was sticky and had a strange comforting scent, a smell he couldn't quite describe, and after a while, he found himself lowered as the drain below him did its work. Pressures unlatched from his back and spine as the glass before him hissed open. The world was spinning.

But somehow, Eurun stood. On shaking legs, he managed the first step, and groping blind, he took three tries to find the edge of the glass. Slowly, he pulled himself out from his erstwhile home, but nearly fell as he tried to find the ground outside.

Two impossibly strong hands caught him. Hands he knew. Hands that held him under his arms, just like when he was a boy. As his vision cleared, Eurun found himself in a cold, pale room, face to face with his mother.

The stranger was right: she looked tired. But her expression was otherwise stone-still and unshaking. Ever the squire.

He winced then, preparing for her to yell at him, to talk about how he was just like his father. But none of that came. She just pulled him close.

And he let her.

After a minute of leaning against her, she spoke next to his right ear. "You, my boy, are a damn fool."

That's more like it. "Sorry. I guess I had to get it from somebody."

Her embrace tightened. "Yeah. I wish you were smarter like your father too, sometimes. Might've made you wise enough to know when to run away."

Eurun chuckled. And Quail Tavers was suddenly just mom once more.

This resurrection wasn't so bad.