

# Guardian Chronicles

## Death becomes me

Guardian year 5608 Earth year 1608

### Prologue by Matt

Hi it's me again your old friend Matt. Normally a routine mission like delivering an item from one place to another would not even be noteworthy of a log, but I got mission to tell you about that was anything but routine. Reaper was accused of murdering a silver Guardian, Master Etan became temporarily insane and a powerful new force arose. What you are about to read, is a murder mystery. Can you figure out who the guilty party is before the end? Will you arise to the challenge? Can you become a Guardian of truth?

### Comments by Andrea also known as 1

The next five years after the wedding came and went in a blur. The new Reaper, I distinguished from the original by calling him by his real name, Drax. We occasionally had some fights like any other couple, but we got along for the most part. I knew the things he liked and was able to use them to soften him up a bit anyway. But even at worst he was still easier to deal with than the original Reaper had been. I'm ashamed to say that part of me was hoping he wouldn't come back. I took Drax back in time to witness several famous battles. Some of which I was apart of. He just loved all the blood and gore of the more primitive's battles involving swords and battle axes. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's consider the last five years. Drax, dear why don't you tell them about how you saw it?

### Drax's comments

I hoped that faker didn't come back. He doesn't know what he's missing. He thinks being married is such a horrible thing. And it would be to the wrong person. Don't get me wrong, Andrea can still get on my nerves sometimes and I have to put her in her place, but she's not a bad wife. I find her love of battle strategy intoxicating. I know when she's feeling playful when she puts on a war recording to get me in a good mood.

The first couple months of being married took some adjusting. She didn't like my way of organizing clothes in our room. There was the dirty pile, the clean pile and the nearly clean pile. That was used in an emergency when necessary. That system made sense to me. But she had this weird idea that all clean clothes should be hung up or neatly folded in a drawer. Women, who can understand them?

Two years after being married, our first child was born. I was hoping he would take after me. But he had too much of his mother in him, I guess. She named him luminous; I suppose I should have gotten the hint then. He is very smart but he is not a killer like me. He's not all bad though, he helped me play a few jokes on his mother. One time we put a force field around the shower so she couldn't get out, then filled it with a thousand hairy spiders. She was mad for days. Now every time she see's a spider she gives me a dirty look, and not the good kind.

There were a few incidents that just drove me crazy, though like family photo day. It took her three hours to get ready. I'm like I know what you look like already, what's the point. Then it was two hours of standing and posing. The one who was taking the Holo-photos was a real diva. He was all like "stand here, do this, stop that." But I made a mental game of it. Every time he would bark a command I would think of two ways to kill him. I was glad when it was over. I was down to using pastries and office equipment for killing instruments.

Then there was our infamous family vacation, last year. We travel all the time in my battle ship, why do we need to go anywhere? I should have know better than to take Etan's advice on anything fun. Don't get me wrong he is a great friend and fun to fight with, but he is too Argarian now for my taste. I think I liked him better before he became too much like Selar. Etan convinced Andrea that we should take our son to somewhere called Disney land.

I wasn't interested until he showed me a poster of a series of contests taking place near there. It was called the best of the best. It had a long list of contests to participate in. Wrestling, running, jumping, swimming, rock climbing, and pie eating just to name a few. All in all, there were over a hundred different contests being put on. I planned to enter them all. That was my only stipulation to my wife. I was going to compete and that's, that. I took on the 100 yard dash and out flanked everybody easily.

I won some kind of cheap gold medal. I got cheers and applause for my performance. Then I got awe and shock when I won the swimming contest too. But, humans must get jealous easily, because after I had won the 5th contest. I was told by some guards, that I needed to leave the premises. They accused me of using something called performance enhancing drugs to win. Of all the nerve, like I need drugs to be great, if they only knew who I really was. But, I had given my word I would not revel my true identity or power on this trip. I might have done it anyway, except I knew Selar would be watching me, Dang it.

Except for a few times like that, the last five years have been pretty good, I must say. I was in the back while Andrea was preparing dinner. I was trying to teach Luminous to use a child sized battle ax. It's never too early to learn the basics you know. I had gotten him to lunge the battle ax at targets with accuracy. He hit all 10, dead on. Hmm with a little practice, and a lot of threats, I mean encouragement I might turn this Argarian pacifist into a killer after all. I was just about to show him the importance of blade sharpness when, the fake me walked back into my life.

### **What a surprise.**

#### **1's view**

I was making our Thursday night favorite, beef fajitas, when the old Reaper walked in. I didn't even know it was him for a minute. I had just got through sautéing the steak meat when I turned around and he was standing there with a silly grin on his face. I looked back and asked

“Dear, I need you to grab another yellow onion from the pantry.” He looked confused.

“I been gone for five years and that's all you've got to say to me?” I was stunned. I started to say what you are talking about. I mean after all he looks exactly like the man I have been married to for the last five years. Then it dawned on me. Oh no! He's back. I stopped what I was doing, and told him to leave.

“Look I've had a great life for the last five years since you have been gone. Drax and I are happy. I don't need you. You obviously didn't want me, and that's why you left. Just go and don't come back.” I was feeling hurt all over again. I had spent many hours thinking how bad I felt. He would rather die or just run away than be married to me.

Before Reaper could answer, Drax walked in with Luminous.

“Honey, guess what our son can do now. He is good at throwing batt...” He paused, mid sentence when he saw the other Reaper. “Oh I see the fake me is back.” Reaper immediately puffed up

“Fake, You're the fake. I'm the original, or should I say the only Reaper. Where did you come from?” Reaper asked. Drax explained how Etan had made him from Reapers toe. Drax strolled up to him in a relaxed manner, and then circled him like a vulture.

"You're out of date. You're obsolete. I'm the better model. Since you've been gone performance reviews, on the ship are up over thirty percent. When you were captain, you had to force people to join your crew, but now I have people waiting in line to join. The Guardians are very pleased with my work."

Reaper shrugged and said "Why do I care what those god want to be's think?"

Drax was calm and playing it cool the whole time. He never let his temper get to him. I was so proud.

"That's your problem. You don't care about anything or anyone but yourself. Now I see how empty that really is." Drax stated.

"You little faker, I'll kill you. I'll gut you and hang your head on my wall for a trophy." Reaper was steaming. His face was red and his hands shaking.

Drax continued "I've grown past you. You're extinct now. Whatever hole you have been hiding in, for the last five years, go crawl back in it, and stay there." Reaper powered up, and suddenly there was a flash of light and Etan appeared. Etan looked his usual tranquil self. He has certainly changed over the years. When I first meet him, he was a nervous wreck, now he was getting to be more like Selar all the time.

"I thought I felt your presence here." Etan stated. Reaper suddenly changed moods, he looked at Etan and said "Buddy good to see you, tell these two idiots that I am the real Reaper. That faker has got to go. I want my battle ship back and him gone." Reaper stated with confidence.

Etan shook his head "Yeah, that's probably not going to happen. The condition for you keeping it was that you continue to work for the Guardians, remember? Not only did you say you quit, but you left for five years. Drax is doing a great job, and he doesn't try to kill every one who says a cross word. He is what you could be if you grew up a bit." Reaper was so stunned; he just stood there in silence. That's the first time; I've ever seen that reaction. "I can't believe you of all people would betray me, this is not over." Reaper said and left with a flash.

### **Reapers journal**

I leave for a measly five year vacation and what do they do, they try to replace me. Etan thinks he's so smart making a replica from my old toe. Of course the look on I's face when she realized it was me was priceless. I didn't even to get to tell him of all my adventures. He missed out on some fun stuff. Fighting the miniature dragon swarm, the fire nebula races, and catching the notorious plague starter, comes to mind. I had fun doing what I wanted to do, without anyone nagging me behind my back, what's wrong with that? This clone of mine cannot stay.

### **Etan's comment's**

To be honest, I'm not sure what to think of all this. Drax was so like the original, that you forget he is the clone. The difference is without the two memories that make him bitter he is much easier to get along with. After awhile I stopped thinking of the old Reaper altogether. But the original was the one I technically had a friendship with, first. Life can be very confusing at times. I plan to do everything I can to help Reaper integrate back into being useful again. One Reaper is dangerous, but who knows what we could accomplish with two of them. I'll have to separate them though, they are too confrontational together. It was weird seeing him jealous of his own clone. He came by to see me privately. I asked him why he hadn't sent me any kind of message or come to see me in all those years. He said

"Well I was busy." I thought "Ohh you were busy for five years and couldn't take a moment to let me know how you were doing. Then you just drop by and demand everything back that you gave up."

## **Mission briefing three months later commentary**

Selar had an important mission for Etan to take on. He wanted Etan, and Drax, to go retrieve a hidden item from Earth. Just off the coast of America in the Bermuda triangle was a crystalline pyramid on the ocean floor. It contained a great evil. It was called the heart of darkness. The chaos Guardians had created it long ago to try to convert Guardians to Chaos agents. It weakened Guardians slightly but did not kill them, but it did work on thier minds and on humans even better. So they used it on earth as an experiment, see if they could cause the entire population to be converted. It had been hidden, but now through a lucky happenstance it had been found.

“You need to obtain it and bring to the place of eternal light.” Selar stated. The place of eternal light was the outer edge of the universe where the universe is constantly expanding. It starts at the inner rim of the universal bubble. It's the space between the inner rim and normal space and is the origin for the energy of the life stream. It is so concentrated that even Guardians cannot go there unprotected. A normal silver or planetary guardian would be incinerated by its radiance. Only Regents or higher had the power to compensate for this. Normal means of transport would not work there either. Only a special made craft specially designed for this could operate or survive its intense energy. Selar told Drax he would have to be the one who handled the heart of darkness because long term effects to Guardians can cause permanent insanity.

Two transmitters contained some of its energy around earth that Etan would be able to retrieve. The heart of darkness was a rare type of crystal that was both powerful and dangerous. Guardian crystals were made from the remains of collapsed universes. But this dark crystalline shard was made from a universe which was saturated with dark energy. Selar had a special container made, to help diminish the hearts effect enough for transport. Once the heart was obtained they would take it to the place of eternal light so it could be destroyed.

## **Just a quick trip Commentary**

For this mission, not only was Etan and Drax going but also a silver Guardian. His name was Loki. He was there in the 11th century when the heart of darkness was first made and then lost. He would be able to recognize it on sight. He was understandably nervous but he knew why he needed to go. The trip to earth was uneventful but it did give Etan time to think though. What were the Guardians going to do with two Reapers? He didn't expect Reaper to be gone so long. He had designed this clone originally to be a temporary fill in. But when Reaper didn't come back he had the Argarian scientist to make him stable enough to be permanent. Otherwise he would have been integrated back into Reapers memories when he returned and the left over bio-mass recycled. But after five years of different experiences they were different people now. Drax still had Reapers confidence and ego but was a little calmer. He also took the time to think things out before just reacting. Drax was an improvement over the old Reaper.

Etan looked out the front screen as the approached earth. He hadn't seen it in many years. Of course this was the year 1608 in earth time, so it didn't look like the earth he remembered. It was still strange he was born in 1938 and got picked by Selar in 2012, which took him back to 1494 and now was working his way slowly back to his own time. It was sad to think of all the evils that was, to come like slavery, the civil war and both world wars not to mention the Vietnam War that he had fought in. Earth needed a Guardian more than any other planet. But up till now, the heart prevented that. With it gone, would Selar change history? Would he prevent those things from taking place? He probably wouldn't since it would mess up the timeline.

## **Etan's view**

We cloaked so we wouldn't be seen. The sight of the ocean and the blues skies were always a welcome sight. I missed earth sometimes. We arrived at the ocean surface and I exited the craft. Drax and Loki continued on to the ocean floor. I had two places on earth to get the transmitters. The first I headed to strangely was called mt Etna, Sicily, similar to my name. I never can get over the number of strange coincidences that I seem to run

into. Not only was this yet again another volcano that I had to deal with, but one similar to my own name. Sometimes it feels like there is a bigger power at work causing these things to happen. Mt Etna was a strata volcano meaning it was built in layers when the magma eruptions happen.

My first task was straight forward. Selar told me what I needed to do to destroy the transmitter. By no surprise it was also crystal based tech. It was buried deep in Mt Etna's magma chamber. I hit it with a sympathetic resonance frequency that eventually shattered the crystal. It was too bad that we couldn't do that with the heart of darkness crystal, but it was made of tougher stuff. The second one was a little more challenging. Originally it was in one of the Hawaiian volcanoes, but apparently had been moved by the magma flow itself. There's no telling what had caused this one to move. I searched all around the magma chamber and I didn't detect any signatures. The Hawaiian volcanoes were actually in a chain. The hot spot under them moved like a conveyer belt. Active ones would die out leaving an empty shell. And newly active ones would form.

Where was the darn thing? Well if it wasn't under the ground maybe it was somewhere on the surface. I flew up and out the nearest volcano. Fortunately the future Hawaii area had several volcanoes to choose from. After a few minutes of flying around I sensed something in the distance. There was a group of villages in the distance. I saw the transmitter on a religious altar. I must have gotten ejected from the nearest volcano and they found it and thought it was a holy item. Now if I just took it, there's no telling how it may affect them. I suppose I could make a replica that looks like it. It would decay over time, but that would be better than it just disappearing all at once. After I made the copy it took a few minutes for me to wait until no one was around. I changed them out. After the deed was done I got out of sight and destroyed the device then went to meet up with Drax.

## **Are two reapers better than one?**

### **Reapers view**

So they thought that they could go on an important mission without me. No sir, not in this universe they're not, and not in any other universes either, I'd wager. I cloaked, and snuck on board. Even Mr. High and mighty Etan didn't detect me. During my five year span I had encountered many new races. I purposely found galaxies in the data base that had not been explored. My goal was to find a place where Guardians had never been. As a consequence, I now had few pieces of tech that not even the all knowing Guardians had yet. One of which was an amazing new type of cloak. Most cloaks were based on one of three types. The most basic was the simple light bending type. It was good for fooling normal eye sight and cameras. The second was a little better; it was based on total wave length alteration. Light or dark energy could be used to manipulate all the other types of energy, when used correctly. The third of course was taking an object out of phase with matter altogether. Not only was the object cloaked but not it could go through other objects like they were made of air. This was normally referred to as intangibility, or phase cloak.

What I had was in a class all to itself. It was called dimensional cloaking. Each universe had various dimensions that were layered upon each other. I first learned of this on the Elemental mission five years ago. One species I ran into had several techs based on that very concept, including the cloak. A person can be partially taken to another dimension, kind of a half in half out state, but un-detectable by either side. In a way while cloaked that person using it does not exist in time or space. It's like they cease to exist at all.

When the fake me, landed the craft on the ocean floor I followed him in. In spite of the pressure of the ocean, the stone and crystal blocks kept the Pyramid air tight. It even had a pool room that the shuttle was able to use to surface. It made accessing the inside from being problematical. Hmm did the creators of the pyramid know that this would end up on the bottom of the ocean? This was obviously designed to deal with oceanic conditions. I'm sure Etan would find all this interesting.

I was a little disappointed that there seemed to be no traps to conquer. Drax and Loki were taking their time to inspect things as they went. Let me guess, Eitan probably wanted them to take readings for some boring historical insights. That worked out well for me. I just barreled forward and got to the middle chamber as quick as I could. How did I know it would probably be in the middle chamber? You ask? If you're expecting some deep and profound thing, then you don't know me at all. Going to the middle just seemed like the right thing to do. Fortunately it turned out to be the right way. In the middle of the center room was an altar with an ancient looking box. When I scanned the complex I saw Drax and Loki were still only about half way through the rooms. Good, I still had plenty time to grab it and make it back to the shuttle. I would be kicked back, snacking on some chips and dip, when he returned. That'll show him.

I uncloaked and tried to grab for it. The darn thing flung me half way across the room. When I hit the wall part of it collapsed. A pile of rocks and debris buried me momentarily. By the time I made it out that faker had the heart and was out of there. Loki had kept his distance from it. Ok, that's just not right. It attacked me, but not him, what's that about? I picked up the pace in unburying myself. By the time I made it all the way back to the shuttle, they were taking off. Dang it, now I'm stuck here. Once again, my preparedness came in handy. I had, one of my shuttles to follow us here, on automation. I couldn't get a signal out, but I adapted my tech arm to a pressurized suit and swam to the surface and called my ship.

### **Drax's Report**

We got in, took the item and got out with no problem. On the way, we heard some rocks falling but it didn't affect us. We scanned the box for traps. We were able to disarm them and grab it without incident. Loki had to keep his distance from the heart. I could feel my dark side intensify some, but at the moment it was under control. For a moment I could almost feel a familiar presence, as if Reaper was here, but no scans showed him present. So I put the device in the container Selar gave us and we left.

### **Loki's Past**

I would be glad to have this mission over with. That thing has caused unspeakable suffering. Of course I can't really blame my problems on it. My whole career as a silver has been one failure after another. So many times I tried to do what was right, to uphold all the Guardian principles but a disaster always seemed to follow. The fellow Drax for example, I had the opportunity to save his mother. She had been kidnapped by the chaos Guardians. They wanted to combine Argarian and chaos Guardian Dna. They hoped to make her have a child who contained both light and dark energy for their use. It was my failure to stop that, which allowed the heart of darkness to ultimately be constructed. I'm not sure how he fit in but supposedly his Dna was used as a template in its design.

Letting his mother die just my first mistake. Then there was Earth. Earth just brought back even more bad memories. They vilified me in their lore. It started out as such a simple seeming assignment. Thor and I were to go to earth and pose as humans and begin leading the people to a more peaceful way of life. Odin was our commanding officer who kept in contact with us. We lived among the people for awhile but we didn't seem to be making much progress. Of course I didn't know at the time that the heart of darkness had been on earth for some time and was affecting us and the human population too. Even we had gotten irritable. Thor suggested that we reveal our true nature and take a stronger hand in the situation. I disagreed with him and thought we should keep up our human guise and continue to try to make changes slowly over a longer period of time.

Because of the effect from the heart we got into an argument over this and then a fight. The locals saw our fight and later learned our true nature anyway. We stopped fighting and tried to explain the situation, but none of us were thinking sanely then. I didn't learn until later that as the years passed that the story got changed. The name Guardians got changed to Asgardians, and Thor and I were told to be warring brothers fighting over reign of the kingdom. I was vilified into the trickster who wanted to enslave others to my will.

Now on this assignment, I had to go to earth, find the heart, and work with Drax. Will my torment never end? I just hope Drax doesn't find out that it was me that caused his mother's death. I don't know if it's the proximity to the heart but I've thought about just killing myself and ending the failure of my life. If nothing else, after this mission is over, I've decided to step down completely from being a Guardian and let myself age normally. At least then in a few decades I'll die of old age.

### Mission preparation 1's comments

The boys returned with the heart of darkness. I didn't actually need to go on this mission, but I had the feeling that I should. I don't know if it had to do with the return of Reaper, or something else. I left luminous with my mom, she always liked to spend time with her grandchild anyway.

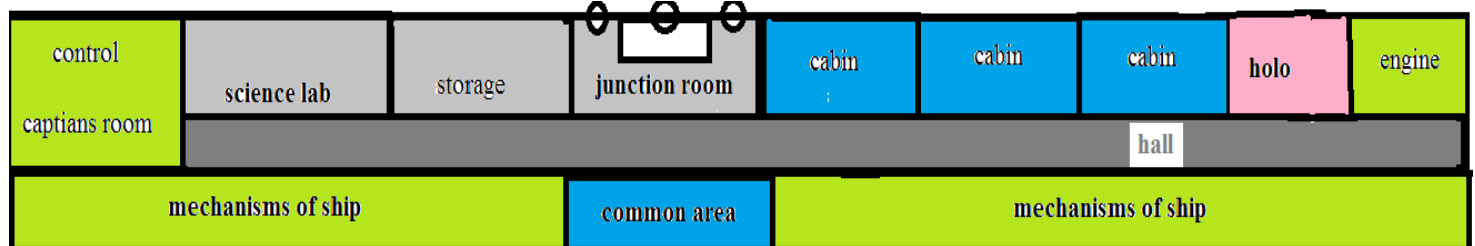
### Etans comments

I hope it won't take too long to get rid of this evil thing, it's giving me a headache. I'm not sure how it's affecting Loki, but my guess is it's probably bothering him too. I came onboard, she hasn't said anything either, but she thought she wouldn't admit weakness or pain. This time it wasn't just me, Loki, Drax, and I, as well as several of Drax's crew were all aboard. We were also assigned a knowledgeable guide. His name was Odysseus, though not the same one as in Greek history, or as far as I know he wasn't. Apparently he was the Guardian expert on the place of eternal light. He was captain's rank, so he outranked me on this mission. I technically still did, even though for the time being she was retired, until her son came of age. She wanted to take time to be a mom. We all met up at Selar's ship for final instructions. A specialized long range vessel was coming to pick us up first. It would carry the smaller transport made to work in the place of eternal light.

We had several kinds of space travel technology. The simplest was good for travel to local planets, warp drive. The second was hyper drive. This technology creates an artificial wormhole in space. You could cross an entire galaxy in a matter of days with this. Then there was a third type that was rarely needed. It was often called the slip stream. It propels a vessel at speeds capable of reaching other galaxies in a matter of hours. It's based on tech that latches on to the nearest piece of the fabric of the universe and the ship is able to ride the strings that connect all of space time. It's like a high tech version of how electrical impulses are able to travel in phone and power lines back on earth.

Even with this tech it took a few days to get where we were going. After we arrived we entered the special transport that was attached to the underbelly of the mother ship. I found it fascinating the transport was made of 10 separate compartments that were attached in a single line, as if this were the space version of a train. And I'll be damned, when it lifted off it made a chugging sound. So I was about to get on a space train headed for the literal edge of the universe. Some day I hoped to find out what sicko was writing the ironic and weird stuff that happens in my life.

The transport entered the outer edge of the saturation point. What was strange was that the outer rim kept moving backwards. The rim of the universe was expanding so it seemed to retreat backwards in relation to our progress forward. According to Odysseus it would take just under five days to reach our destination.



## **All aboard--Day one**

### **I's comments**

We were going to be on this train for a few days, so we all tried to settle in right away. Etan and Loki took cabin three in the back. The three crew members from Drax's ship took cabin two in the middle and Drax and I had cabin one. Odysseus of course had his own permanent captain's room in the control room. I strolled through making a quick look at every compartment. It came with years of military training. Always know your surroundings.

The whole ship was an elongated line of attached modules. There was a wide hall in the middle, and the compartments along its length on both sides. The left side contained the workings of the ship, and the right side the cabins and other necessary rooms. The first compartment up front was the control room and captains space. The second was a high tech science lab. I'm sure Etan will love that. The third was just a storage room for tools, and supplies. The fourth where we entered the ship was the junction room. It was adapted with two separate bulk heads. Someone could place an item in the outer most segment of the room and close off the inner one. They could take samples or allow an item to be placed outside the ship without compromising the whole room.

Just across from the junction room on the mechanism side was a common room for meals. Most high level tech, like replicators wouldn't work here but a few basic ones did. They kept frozen food in containers for us to use. At least basic tech like gas powered burners still worked just fine. I see I would have to spend a lot of time cooking for everyone the next few days that was ok, I actually liked to cook. I enjoyed having a normal domestic life for once. I had spent so many years just going from one fight to another, it seems.

The next three were the passenger cabins. And lastly was the engine room. As I understood it, the intense light energy was directly harnessed and heated up and was used to propel the craft. Etan said this was like an old steam engine back on earth. After my initial look I decided to rest for a few minutes, I was feeling light headed. I see Etan wanted to take a look at things too. After he and Drax got into an Argument, I decided to go find a quiet place to lie down.

### **Odysseus's comment**

I've done several scans of the ship, but I feel uneasy. I get the feeling I'm being followed. It's like when you're alone in an old house and you hear an unfamiliar sound that makes you jump. I been here many times and this region has never made me feel like this before. The passengers seem restless, several walked back and forth a few times. I don't know why they just didn't go to the Holo-room and relax.

### **Drax's comments**

I've never been a patient person, but I can usually relax when the time comes. I broke out the chips and dip mix my wife made and got ready to kick back for awhile. But I was like a restless animal. It was the same feeling I get right before I go into battle. Maybe I just needed to do something to do.

I used my scanner to take a peak at the rest of the ship, nothing of interest except the science lab. I saw a few of the others walking around. I didn't want them to know what I was doing so I cloaked and proceeded down to the lab. But it turned out to be a wasted trip. The stupid heart thing was gone; I was hoping I could get a good look at it, before it got destroyed. The Guardians wanted all knowledge of it to be destroyed too. That meant it was powerful, and that meant it could be used as a weapon. I think my cloak was being partially disrupted by the local energy radiance because Etan was acting strangely. I wondered if he somehow sensed me.

It had taken years of work to make a cloak that Guardians have difficult time seeing through. Ok it wasn't actually my work, it was a chaos Guardian cloak, but I'm sure they worked quite hard on it none the less. Why let it go to waste? Now where, would the heart be taken? Maybe the captain had needed it for something? I need to get in the control room. When I got close to the control room door I could feel it. I didn't know where they



had it, but it was close. I was only in the hallway for a few minutes when I felt a powerful presence draw near. My dark side began to assert itself. A voice came to my head but I couldn't quite make out the words, but it was getting louder. I quickly teleported back to my room, and the voices faded. Someone, who knew me well, was using my dark energy against me. I continued to scan the ship for activity. Later Etan came in accusing me of messing with his head. I didn't know what he was talking about.

### **Etan's comments**

Thankfully this headache finally went away, but I still can't relax. I keep thinking about earth and my past life, about the mistakes I made and the sadness I felt. I purged myself of those years ago, why are they surfacing now? I can't put my finger on it, but I get the feeling I'm being followed. If there is someone after me, I will find them. I made a run through the ship looking for anything suspicious. There was nothing unusual except, that I seemed to be following me. What reason did she have to follow me? No, I'm that can't be, she probably wasn't. Though someone had gotten careless and left the inner door to the junction room open. Nothing else seemed out of place. Normally I would have liked to stay and look into the science room, but I couldn't let my guard down. Since I had looked around and all seemed well, I decided to go rest, but I kept hearing gun fire far away, gun fire similar to the ones used in Vietnam. If this was Drax's idea of a joke, I was not amused. In fact I decided to go, ask him about it, directly.

### **Loki's comments**

I shouldn't have come. I wanted to see this thing destroyed. It had destroyed me, so I wanted to return the favor. Of course even when it's gone, my life will still be pointless. I don't know why the Guardians have even let me keep my job this long. If I were to die, would anyone even miss me? I doubt it. I quietly made my way to the junction room and stared out the portal. The pure radiance would engulf a body in less than a second. Anything biological became part of the life stream here, even Guardians. Though I'm sure Selar could come here, if he wanted to.

How easy it would be to open this door and just let myself go, quick, fast and painless. And my energy would give something else life somewhere down the line, I imagine. I stood and stared at the door button for what seemed like an eternity. All I had to do was push two little buttons. One button to close the inner most doors and one to open the outer ones, and that would be that. There was actually a safety mechanism to prevent that kind of thing, but that was easy to get around. My fingers played across the buttons a few times. Why was I even hesitating? What did I have to live for? Suddenly I felt a presence behind me.

### **Reapers comments**

So far know no one even knows I'm here. I was concerned that I would have to make a distraction to get Loki away from the others, but he saved me the trouble. I can't believe that amateur Drax was still using my old pass codes on his computer. But the boy's mistake was my good fortune. It was that mistake that allowed me to find out about this mission. After all these years, I would get to take revenge on that incompetent half wit, Loki.

Why did the Guardians even keep him anyway? Etan told me if I got married, then I would get the chance to meet my mother's killer, though I never expected it to be in this way. My plan was simple. I would wait until Loki was alone, then cloak him in my dimensional field and kill him slowly. When he was dead, I would jettison the body outside. Just then my tech arm showed that my Dimensional cloak was failing. The increased radiation outside was somehow interfering with it. I changed to a normal chaos cloak and waited. Sure enough Loki came strolling down the hallway. He even went straight for the junction room. He was making this way too easy. I pulled out my blade and prepared to strike, when my dark energy surged. Perhaps Drax was coming. I couldn't let anyone see what I was doing, so I tele'd out of the room and waited for another opportunity.

## **Officer Kek, Applied sciences.**

I didn't know what all the activity was for, but everyone seemed restless. Gars and Tel were no better, they were unusually edgy today. We've seen our share of battles, they always handled it well. But this is something different. I'm Onari, so maybe I just didn't understand human emotions. I don't really need to be here. I'm guessing Drax wanted me along to get a good look at the heart. Knowing him, he was hoping we could adapt it into a new kind of weapon. He was impressive in his knowledge of weapons and war, though he is much easier to get along with than that awful Reaper was. All Reaper did was bark commands, but never really appreciated anything we did. I hope we can keep this Reaper and not the old one. Finally everyone settled down and eventually went to sleep.

### **First night**

#### **Etan's comments**

In an emergency I can go days without my body actually needing to shut down. My mind can take quick naps while Matt controls my body. But there was no need for that right now. We weren't in a battle or tense situation. But now I wish I had just stayed awake. I had terrible nightmares involving memories from Vietnam. I had never been captured by the Vietnamese, but in my dreams I did. When I woke up I was crouched in a small container in a dark room. I found my way out and saw I was in the storage room. What was going on? I had never had nightmares since becoming a Guardian, or sleep walked. How had I gotten here? As I was walking toward my room, I could sense someone coming, so I hid. I didn't want to try to explain what I was doing in the storage room this time of night.

#### **Drax's comments**

I must have drank too much caffeine earlier, dang it. Etan had introduced me to it. Normally I could counter it, with my tech arm when I needed to shut down, but right now, it was almost useless. To make matters worse, I was snack hungry. Now where did I leave the chips and dip? Oh yeah, the Holo- room. Maybe I could sneak out without waking the dragon. What am I saying of course I could, I am Drax.

Slowly turning over, I slide out of the bed. I had perfected this maneuver some time ago. The room and hall was dark, but I had enhanced eyes. My eyes scanners didn't work but my bio-enhancements still did. This kind of situation is why I had it done in the first place. You never know when any piece technology will become useless or obsolete in a given situation. When I went to the Holo- room my chips and dip were gone. I could have sworn I left them there. None of my crew would take them, they knew better.

I exited the Holo- room and saw a shadowy figure down the hall. That must be my thief. I'd catch him chip handed, as it were. For thier sake there better be some of it left. Ill say this for my wife, she can cook. Her Mex chip dip is to die for, and since I'm Reaper, it works for me. Hmm to die for, I wonder if I can invent a lethal jalapeño. I would force someone to eat it and, watch him suffer the burn, and then die slowly and painfully. I would call it Death- Mex, Hehe, got to remember that one later. The person in the hall was quiet, like they were trying not to get caught. By the time I got past the three cabins, and was up to the junction room, they disappeared.

#### **1's comment**

I heard him get up. He likes to sneak out sometimes. Sometimes I catch him, sometimes not. I think he does that just to have something to be sneaky about. This night, I had a feeling I knew what he was up too. With him I had to guess. Most people I could read thier minds, but he had certain enhancements that make it difficult to read his mind. Selar did that because of all the missions he goes on for them. In case he got captured by a dark agent it would be harder to find out any secrets from him, although no one had heard from any chaos agents since the elemental incident five years ago. I figured he wanted to find the heart and figure out how to turn it

into a weapon. Selar had specially forbid it. But that wouldn't stop him from studying it, and making some kind of tech based on its workings.

He once bragged he could turn absolutely anything into a weapon. He went around the house picking up random items and coming up with as many ways to kill someone with that item as he could. You would think he would have gone for the knives but no, he picked up stuff like, a spoon, a dish towel holder, and a cake pan. I think he was just showing off.

He liked to collect odd ball things from earth. I wish Etan had never shown him his planet. You would think that it was Drax's home planet by the way he talked about it. His collection included a Rubix cube, record player, and eight track tapes, whatever that was. He showed me something called a paper clip. It was a small piece of twisted metal, nothing impressive. But he went on for half an hour demonstrating different ways to kill a man using just the paper clip.

If tonight he wanted to get the heart, I needed to stop him. Selar had asked me to keep an eye on him. I waited for a moment. I put my hand to the door and sensed. He went toward the Holi-room. Maybe I was wrong, maybe just he couldn't sleep. Now I was embarrassed. Had I over reacted? He left the Holi-room a moment later. I quickly jumped back in bed, so he wouldn't notice, but he never appeared.

I went back to the door, and sensed again. This time he was headed for the science lab. Ahh, so I was right after all. He's not the only one that can be sneaky. I had a power move I liked. I called it mind roaming. I could make my sight and awareness leave my body and wander around. This wasn't always practical, since it left my body paralyzed and vulnerable but right now I wasn't in physical danger. So I could do it without having to worry about being attacked. I came up behind Drax and waited to see what he was going to do next. He was looking inside the junction room for some reason. Had he already gotten the heart and was hiding it?

## Day two

### Loki's veiw

By the next morning everyone was worn out. We all set around the table eating the breakfast I had prepared. It had been awhile since I've had any kind of home cooking. I felt like everyone was staring at me. Maybe they saw this situation, as my fault for what was going on. No one said very much during breakfast. They all know each other well; I expected lively conversation from this group. But they looked like I felt. After breakfast I just went back to the cabin alone. I made up my mind that tonight, when everyone was asleep I would be out of their life forever.

### Etans comments

Apparently I was one of the few who actually slept last night. Everyone else looked like something from a horror movie. Even though I slept, I had bad dreams, so I still felt horrible. After a few minutes Loki left the room. He looked even more depressed than usual. I was able to hide it but now I was having day visions. I would get flashes of things from my past. For a moment I looked like a lady I had seen die during the war. The room seemed to fade away. The sound of helicopters was so loud in my ears that it was almost deafening. I could hear the screams of people crying. I had heard it before. My unit walked upon a small Vietnamese village that had just been attacked. The few people in the village that survived were mourning thier dead. I could feel the hot breeze blowing on me right now. Suddenly I was being hit by stray bullets. I had to get out of there.

## **1's comments**

I was restless all night but I got up and cooked breakfast for everyone, anyway. Some of the food kept disappearing, though no one but me was near the burner. Maybe I'm just losing my mind. Drax looked beat; he obviously had a rough night too. Loki looked even more depressed than usual. And Etan looked nervous and uncomfortable. Then for no reason he started screaming and ran out of the room. The three crew members shrugged and went back to eating. Only Odysseus looked normal.

## **Drax's comments**

That Loki guy better watch out. He's been staring at me all mourning. He wants to die, and I'll be happy to oblige him. To tell the truth he looked half dead already. Etan didn't look much better, he was a nervous wreck. Apparently I was right, because he screamed for no reason then ran out of the room. The eggs weren't that bad, were they?

If I've ever needed a pick me up it was now. I looked at my wife and said "Andrea, dear, I need a refill on my coffee." Dang Etan for getting me hooked. The others looked at me with understandable confusion. I was one of the few that knew her by her real name. We had an unspoken understanding that I could ask her for most anything, as long as I asked in a husbandly way. Sometimes I pushed that just because I could. But this morning I didn't have the mental fortitude for a good bout, I just needed my java. She smirked at me in that annoying female way and said. "I'm sure you do. You look more like death right now than when you wearing your cloak." That perked me up a bit. We still had our fights sometimes but being married wasn't so bad. Of course sometimes I start a fight just for the fun of it.

## **Odysseus's view**

I hated to break the bad news but we were about to go from the radiance edge of the eternal light to the storms section. My timer was showing just less than half an hour. Loki finished his meal and left. Later Etan ran out the room. A few minutes later he came back. He was shaken up, but he was calmer now. I stood and was about to make my announcement.

## **Reaper view**

It was weird. I went to sleep in the supply room and woke up here in the common room. I've never sleep walked before, what was that about? Oh well, I was hungry anyway. The battle ax was cooking. My dimensional cloak was not working but for the moment my normal cloak was. I kept snatching biscuits and eggs to eat. She looked confused when she noticed they were missing.

Odysseus stood up and was about to say something, when the whole ship shook violently. By the surprised look on his face, whatever happened was something he didn't expect. I got up; I decided to go back to my cloaked ship. I had it attached under this ship. I disabled this ships sensor in that area to avoid detection. I didn't know what was going on, but I should be able to find out from fighter. Unfortunately my regular cloak chose now, to completely go out. Why couldn't it have waited for just one more minute? Then I would have been out of the room and out of sight. When I appeared I still had an egg and cheese biscuit in my mouth.

I tried to fake everyone out.

"I'm not really here; I'm just a trick of your imagination."

I slowly backed out the room. Everyone was in shock for a moment. I think I actually had them psyched out, then Odysseus ruined everything by touching me and stating

"He's real alright."

Then everyone went from stunned to freak out. Etan began swatting at invisible things, **1** fainted. Two of my old ship crew screamed and began fighting each other. Drax was taking a knife and cutting long bloody marks in his arms. Odysseus's was covering his head as if he was hearing a loud sound. Did I smell bad or something? Look, my appearance couldn't have been that shocking. I tried to get out of there, when my whole body went numb as if someone had just drained energy from me. The next moment I heard a voice in my head say "Run." I stumbled along but I managed to get out of the room, before everyone recovered.

### **Odysseus's view**

First the ship began to shake, and then another Reaper appeared. What was going on? We weren't supposed to enter the stormy area for another few minutes. But that shaking sounded like a vortex. Before I could find out, my ears were bombarded by an overwhelming screech. It was so powerful it gave me a headache and blurred my vision. In spite of what was going on, I staggered to the control room. When I got there the news was not good. I had to shut down the whole ship. There was a crack in the crystal core. The engine works by the crystal collector gathering the local energy and storing it. Then it is pressurized and used as propulsion. But now it was damaged. And worse yet we well into the storm field. After looking further at the crystal I realized the crystal wasn't repairable. We would have to wait for the life stream currents to push us back out of the light field. We would not be able to make our goal of getting to the Rim of the universe, until a new crystal could be replaced.

### **Kek's comments**

First Reaper appears then everyone freaks out. Humans and Argarians are very odd. Thankfully everyone calmed down again after a few minutes but Reaper was gone. It left everyone with the question of was he really here at all? I told them since I don't seem to be affected by the forces affecting them and I saw him, he was probably real. We set about searching the ship but found nothing at first. I had the experience of dealing with Reaper, I knew how he thought. He would not have come aboard and leave himself vulnerable. I'm sure the others would have thought of this, were they thinking rationally. Most likely Reaper brought along a small shuttle or fighter to leave in when needed. There were only two reasons for him to come aboard. One was to kill Loki and the other to steal the heart. I wouldn't put it past him to do both.

I asked to see schematics of the ship for study. I found a reasonable place to start, but I didn't plan to go alone. There was a maintenance hatch in the engine room. That would be a good inconspicuous place for him to attach any other small vessel too. Of course that was just a theory, but it all I had to go on at the moment. The sensors were down in the area and the hatch was sealed shut. We couldn't afford to be wrong on this. If we remotely opened the hatch and we were wrong, massive energy would flood the compartment damaging the systems. We could easily lose all remaining life support power. The most logical course would be to set up a camera and monitor the hatch and keep looking for Reaper. We spent all day searching every inch of the craft but with no luck. He had to be past the hatch in another vessel.

The day continued without finding Reaper, but with increasing mental break downs from the others. Etan continued to see visions and **1** had constant crying fits in with temper tantrums. Odysseus wasn't violent but would pass out from sensory overload. I ended up sedating the two human officers for their own safety. One of the officers had taken a knife to the other. Drax just kept cutting himself and seeing how long it took each time for his bio-enhancements to heal him. At one point he came after me, but fortunately I knew a weakness of his, a mirror. He loved to look at himself. I kept a small one in my pocket for such emergencies. Now that he was even more crazy than usual, he became entranced by his own marred image. After that he stood there and cut his face and watched himself in the mirror. He was always a bit of sick man; this situation wasn't helping to improve that any.

When I had done all I could in the search, I proceeded to the control room. I could see in the limited scanners the currents of energy. I set the transport on a course to enter one that flowed outward. I would probably take a few days to get out, but hopefully when free, we could signal the waiting mother ship. It wasn't until that night when everything really got mixed up.

## Night two

### Loki--11pm

Ok, everyone was in thier cabins. I'll excuse myself and just get this over with. Etan was too distracted by his visions he wouldn't notice me. I could hear Drax and 1 arguing as I passed thier cabin. Here I was back at the junction room, this time, no backing out. But I did hesitate once again. I guess it was all the years of Guardian training. I suddenly felt a familiar presence. It was the same presence I had felt the other day. Suddenly it all made sense; I knew I had to warn the others of the danger before it was too late.

### Drax's view

When I walked in, she was blubbering something about the other Reaper. What's with her? Normally I like to see anyone go into a good rant, but this time it didn't even make sense. I decided to just hang out in the Holo-room until she calmed down. I noticed a commotion down the hall. There were two shadowy figures in the junction room, talking. Suddenly I felt my dark side take control of me, and I blacked out. I woke up several hours later in the science lab holding a torn piece of fabric and blood on my hands.

## Day three

### Etan's view

Once again I woke up in a strange place. I was lying in the junction room floor. I felt numb all over. Usually I feel this way after a major guardian maneuver. It was as if something had drained all my light energy or I had used it up in a powerful attack. The worst part of it is that all I had is flashes of memories. I remember powering up and sending out a massive energy wake in someone's direction. I also remember seeing the outer door to the junction room open. What did I do? What was going on here?

### Reapers view

The last thing I remember was running through the halls toward my ship. Then I woke on the floor in the hallway with my dark shard blade in my hand. It was bloody, but whose blood was it? I got a quick flash in my mind of a torn uniform, and an open doorway. What have I done?

### 1's veiw-

I had cried myself to sleep. I don't know why I felt the way I did. Reaper was not going to come back into my life like this, and it wasn't just that, it was everything. This was hard enough with both Reapers but I had been good friends with Loki at one time too. It was terrible to see him in such a state now. I liked being a mom now. The early part of my life, my father had pushed me to be a great military leader. He never even gave me the chance to explore other things. By the time he changed, I was a powerful military leader.

When I woke up I noticed Drax wasn't there. But lying beside me in bed was Loki's uniform and it was torn and bloody. When I tried to think on last night, I got light headed. What happened?

## **Kek**

Someone or something drugged me last night. I could still feel its affects the next morning. The group was sitting and just staring at each other in the common room when I got up. There were two missing crew members though. Odysseus and Loki were both absent. The others looked like there were in a daze. Although I was a little groggy from the after effects of whatever knocked me out, I was other wise fine. I decided to do the first sensible thing I could, and see about the control room. That would let me check on Odysseus and the ship's progress toward getting out of this place. The control room was wielded shut from the outside. It took a while but with the help of an enhanced burner I managed to cut my way through.

On the floor was Odysseus, dead. He had cuts all over his body and the floor was covered with blood. I was assuming it was his blood from the situation, but I couldn't be sure. But there was no apparent weapon present. While there I checked to see that the ship was in the light stream and slowly drifting back toward normal space. Good, at least that part was going right. After checking on Loki, I discovered he was missing from the ship completely. And that no one remembered to watch for the other Reaper coming out the hatch. There was one small bit of good news; the camera did take a picture of Reaper coming out of the hatch. High tech equipment wouldn't work, but a low tech camera with a motion sensor did the trick nicely.

That was the confirmation I needed. I proceeded to the hatch with a basic weapon and went after him. He was lying on the floor, and he was in a lot of pain. I carried him back to the common area. My race has the ability to see infrared heat and a few other wave lengths. It came with our species being natural predators I suppose. I could see he was missing all his dark energy. I went to science lab and gathered an empty crystal and planned to use it to absorb and small potion of Drax's dark energy. He was low but he had enough to share. After the infusion, Reaper looked a little better. I was one of the few people he had told about the elemental bridge. I knew it needed his dark energy to keep balanced. Now, it was good he had told me.

While everyone was still in a daze I decided to take reasonable precautions. I took a few of the energy suppression crystals that were used in the shield to construct suppression collars for everyone to wear. I told them I am asking all of you to wear one of these until we get to the truth here. Etan and 1 understood the need but Reaper and Drax refused. I went on to explain that if they didn't we would have to assume they were the culprits and would be tried in a court accordingly. Both were so drained they could hardly move, anyway so they didn't put up more of a fight. None of them were making much sense so it was still up to me to direct the investigation. I had Etan, Drax, Reaper and 1 to stay in the common room while I and the two other officers checked out the ship.

### **The investigation Kek's view continued**

#### **Control room**

I was no detective but I normally did scientific research. So I should be able to narrow the possibilities until I could get to the truth. Me and my crew mates started at the front and proceeded room by room. Besides Odysseus's body was there anything else that could be learned here? I checked the internal monitoring systems. They were all wiped clean, all except one. It wasn't a standard monitoring system in the conventional sense but it might give me some insight. It was used to regulate the shielding system. There were five aboard the ship, but only two were working. They were close to the junction room. It was designed to make sure a dangerous amount of light energy didn't get inside the craft. I played back the recordings. I could see humanoid energy spikes walking through the ship. The two Reapers each looked identical. If this mechanism, had been more refined I could have told thier signatures apart, but with this equipment I couldn't. It was only designed to detect large amounts of energy, not work as a life form scanner.

I started with last nights recording. One energy figure walked down the hall to the junction room. Then one of the Reapers came up behind it. It must have been one of the Reapers because of both the light and dark energy present. They stood there for a moment. A third energy signature appeared beside him. Its energy was fluctuating wildly. Suddenly the first signature went dark. Someone died. I was guessing that was one of the dead Silvers, either Odysseus or Loki. A massive energy surged right then, and marred the recording. Either it

was an energy surge from outside or someone was attacking the other person. Two more energy signatures appeared. And the rest of the recording was damaged beyond repair. It wasn't everything I needed but at least that was a start. There was nothing else in the control room of use right now, so we proceeded to the science lab.

## **Round one Commentary**

Kek walked back in with news. He reported to them what he found out in the control room. Drax spoke up

"I knew it, that psycho killed Loki. Don't get me wrong I was tempted too, but I didn't."

Reaper glared at him "Who are you calling psycho, toe boy?"

"You" Drax responded "you're the obvious suspect. You still hate guardians, and I don't. You came here uninvited and cloaked. I came here on a mission. And I'm betting you came here for the purpose of killing Loki. Am I right?"

This time reaper did not respond. He had always been so vocal about his hatred toward guardians. "Hmm, see his silence is confirmation." Drax stated.

"I didn't kill him" Reaper blurted out. I wanted too, but for some reason I didn't.

"Ahh, so you admit you came here to kill him yes?" Drax stated.

Reaper looked like he was seething but was controlling himself for the moment "I came here to kill him, but like I said I didn't."

"So you remember the events of last Night then?" Kek asked.

"No" Reaper answered.

"Then how do you know you didn't kill him?" he asked again.

"I don't remember anything; all I know is that I didn't." Reaper stated.

"Oh so, all we have to go on is your feelings. And we can trust those because you're such a feely guy." Drax stated.

Reaper stood up and got in Drax's face, "I didn't kill him, but I don't mind killing you."

Kek interjected "let's get back to the business at hand shall we? Reaper how do you explain your bloodied blade?" Kek had noticed it, when he was carrying Reaper here. Here was a bloody weapon. Reaper had the motive and opportunity. He hated to say it, but it was looking pretty bad for Reaper.

"I can't" Reaper said.

In spite of reapers temper and reputation he didn't want his old boss to be tried unfairly.

"Why cant we just wait until we get out then Selar can read our minds and know the truth." Drax asked.

"Because" Etan began "whoever did this might not want the heart returned. We need to know the truth before something else happens."



"Where is the heart?" I asked.

"We don't know. Kek answered "we haven't found it yet."

"Ok then, let me ask the obvious question. How come Mr. knows everything, didn't see this and prevent it?" Reaper asked.

"Good question" Etan mused "We know that chaos guardians have learned to mask certain actions or tasks with enough dark energy. They could have used a number of dark guardians to mask these events. What bothers me is to mask something like this would take a lot of dark guardians working together. If they put that many resources into it, it must be really important. We've got to find the heart and destroy it."

Everyone looked at Reaper. "What? Why are you all looking at me? I told you I didn't do it." Reaper said, trying to defend himself. Kek decided to continue his search through the ship.

## **Science lab Kek's view**

We searched from the floor boards to the upper air ducts in the science lab for further evidence. The heart had been in a locked container, meant to suppress it. Odysseus and Etan were the only ones with the code to the container. I examined it very thoroughly. I didn't see any damage to it at all. But its computer showed two times it was accessed. There was one more useful piece of evidence to be found here. The Reaper toe Etan had kept for a souvenir. He had used some of its cells to have the clone made but kept the toe, just to annoy Reaper I'm sure. It was lying under a pile of junk scattered all over the floor. It looked like the ship had gotten shaken pretty bad at some point. I think I'm glad I was out for all of it. I sent the men to look in the cabins next while I went back to talk with the group. We had already seen the blood on the floor in the junction room. But we still weren't close enough to the edge of the light field to use scanners to identify it.

## **Round two**

Kek went back to the common room, this time to question Etan.

"Tell me Etan, before now, have you been able to use your powers?" Etan nodded. "Of course, the ambient radiation affects tech but, as long as we are shielded in the ship it doesn't affect Guardian powers."

"That's what Kek thought. "You are an expert form changer are you not?" Kek asked.

Etan confirmed back "You know that I am."

Kek continued "So with this toe, you could copy Reapers Dna, and essentially become him, if you wanted too? Not just his appearance but his dark energy too, since you would be copying his entire Dna?"

The others now stared at Etan now with distrust. "Its true I could have. But I'm not that kind of person." Etan responded. They all looked back to Reaper. He certainly was.

Drax spoke up "but what if you did it unknowingly? That thing was on earth. You are from earth. Selar said it did something to human Dna. Maybe that's why it affected you first and more so than us, it seems."

Etan shook his head "Since I don't remember, I cannot either confirm or deny that accusation."

Kek stated "So you admit it is possible you could have done it. You had the ability, opportunity and now perhaps motive controlled by the heart." Sadly Etan had to agree. It was not looking good for him.

Just then one of the crew reported in. Gars stated "While we were checking Drax's cabin I noticed chips crumbs on the floor. Then it dawned on me. I hadn't noticed them before. I rechecked and there was some around the heart container. I did a quick sweep in other rooms. I didn't find anything suspicious until I got back to the engine room. There were a few crumbs around the hatch. He was there. The hatch is mangled and broken. I've seen this before. It's when a ship is attached to a hatch, the security lock is on, but the ship forcibly removes itself."

Kek nodded "Good work" Kek looked at Drax "Why were you at the back hatch?"

Drax denied it "I never went to that room, other than the first day just peeking in to see what's there. It didn't look like anything interesting to me so I left."

Gar spoke up "But the crumbs were at the hatch not at the door, so someone who was eating chips was at the hatch."

Kek considered this. "Come to think of it. I saw Drax speaking with Etan several times. In his confused state Etan could have been easily manipulated by Drax."

Reaper agreed "See I told you it was him. Just look at those beady eyes."

Etan laughed "What are you talking about. I don't have beady eyes."

"Not you" Reaper said "Toe boy. He looks unstable." Kek wanted to respond to that comment so bad, but he had to be the one to keep a calm head. But one thought did occur to him.

"I have noticed you all seem quite calm and sane now. None of you have seen visions or done anything crazy in the last few minutes." No one voiced what we were all thinking. No influence must mean the heart was off the ship. With no sensors we would have a hard time finding it.

## **The Cabins**

### **Keke's view**

For the most part, what we found in the cabin was what we expected, a few clothes and sundry bathroom items. Etan and Loki both had brought along books to read. By no surprise Etan was reading a science journal. But it was strange that Loki had been reading a book on self improvement. Maybe before he came aboard he had been doing better. It was a shame that he subjected himself to the heart of darkness's influence once again.

I hit on a little bit of luck. Loki had kept a journal. Some of the past months journal indicated he was doing better. He had been working with children who were ill. He was reasonably proficient at most healing. Once he came on board his attitude changed. He indicated his depression had come back. He felt like both Reapers were after him. From a few later statements in his journal, he seemed to be thinking of killing himself. But he also thought one of the Reapers was trying to kill him first. He seemed to take relief from that, as it would save him the shame of killing himself. He also mentioned that his old feeling for **1**, had returned. They had never actually dated, but he had feelings for her. He was hoping to go see her in private later.

In **1**'s cabin I found a most disturbing item. Loki's torn and bloody uniform. She must not have been thinking straight this morning, she should have told me about it, herself. I could now see another possibility. What if in her altered mental state, she had an affair with Loki. Drax found out and killed Loki in revenge. Drax tries to pretend he just puts up with her, but I know he cares for her at least a little.

Or the opposite, could be true. Loki could have come on to strong to **1**, and she reacted. Under the influence of this evil heart, she could have killed him without much forethought. And now later when she regained some of her mental capacity she feels the regret of the act. Even if she can't remember doing it, she might subconsciously feel guilty about it. The more I have investigated this crime, the more questions arise.

Later I asked her about it, but she denied them. Now I was back to square one. I had bits and pieces of evidence, many questions but few answers.

## **An unexpected appearance**

### **Commentary**

Kek looked around the ship more. Of course by no surprise, blood was found on the floor of the junction room. He had seen what looked like someone dying in the recording. Odysseus was the only one confirmed dead, but he was guessing the one who died in the junction room was actually Loki. After Kek had done what he could he went back to check on the group. When he left them they were almost back to normal. But now they were all sitting and starrng with blank looks.

“What’s the matter with all of you?” he asked. A shadow appeared in front of Kek and stabbed him in his primary heart. The Onari had two hearts the primary and secondary ones. The secondary one was normally used as a boost in times of physical strain. It wasn't meant to take over completely. It could only sustain him like this for an hour or less before he died. He already felt himself getting weaker. The shadow spoke in a hissing manner reminiscent of a snake.

“I really must thank you for all your help.” the shadow said. “By keeping everyone distracted and by putting the suppression collars on them, you helped me greatly. As a reward for your help, I’ll tell you what really happened last night.”

Kek managed to get out “I don't know what you are, but the guardians will stop you.” The shadow laughed.

“What I am the heart of darkness. The box is what generates me, makes me possible. I've been on earth for over a thousand years gaining strength. I send out dark waves and the population becomes darker and sends me more dark energy in return. But when you gave me not one, but two Reapers to feed off of here, is when I become strong enough to take on physical form.”

Kek responded “What are you still doing here?” The shadow was impressed. “You have a most keen mind. It’s too bad you don't work for the chaos agents, you would be most beneficial. But to answer your question, I am still here for the moment to see about everyone's death, not just you. I am growing in thier minds right now. In a few moments I will have penetrated their minds enough enough to make them kill themselves. Everything that has happened I have directed. And it had gone very well, thanks to you.”

The shadow continued “You came surprisingly close to the truth in your investigation. Loki had gone to the junction room to kill, himself. But he ended up backing out. Reaper came long to kill him, but he decided not too. Well I couldn't let that happen. So I possessed Odysseus for a moment. He was so far gone, it wasn't hard. I used him to stab Loki with the grim blade, a blade that specifically kills Guardians. That will be my special bonus to all this.”

Kek stated “Now what I saw on the recording makes sense. But what happened to Odysseus?”

The shadow seemed quite pleased.” Yes I'm quite proud of myself for that. After Odysseus plunged the blade in Loki, I handed the blade to Reaper. Then I moved back into reapers dark energy and hid. Odysseus didn't remember what I just did through him. Each one thought the other was responsible for Loki's death. Drax entered the room just then. Both Reapers teamed up on Odysseus. Odysseus was scratched by the blade and took him a few minutes to die. He retreated to the control room and the Reapers welded him in.

“Ah I see now” Kek interjected. He could feel his life draining away. “What about the others?”

The shadow continued “Yes, I was afraid, they would mess things up. Etan and I came down the hall, to see what was going on. I had Etan so far in his visions that he thought Reaper was an old war buddy in Vietnam. I took Drax's side of course. They fought back and forth for a few moments until everyone was worn out. Now was my time to act. I took control of Loki's dead body. Etan and Reaper fought with me. Etan gave Drax the code to retrieve my box. They were playing right into my hand.

“His plan was to eject the box into the light and hope it nullified me. Little did they know it would give me power. Drax threw the box in the outer junction room. We had been engaged in combat the whole time. Now they separated themselves from me and worked together to push me with the box into the outer room. I pretended to make a leap for the box as if I didn't want it to be there. When the outer door opened the box received a massive energy boost. My box was made to convert light energy to dark energy. I powered up enough to knock everyone out. When the door opened Loki's body was absorbed into the local light radiance. I didn't have his body to use Anymore but now I finally had the power to physically manifest.”

Kek groaned “They didn't take time to consider how your box works.”

The shadow nodded again. “I see I did wisely in having you knocked out. You might have ruined my whole plan. Now where was I? Oh yes after that it was a simple matter of picking up my box and proceeding to Reapers ship. I tried to stop me. She was in the back and had taken slightly less of a hit than the others. She ran after me and locked the hatch. She thought she had me, after all the main engines wouldn't work here. And the small maneuvering thrusters that would work here would not have enough power to pull away. But I had spent enough time in reaper head; I knew a good bit of what he knew. I thought of a trick he once used. I activated two missiles and deactivated thier explosive heads. The thrust from them was plenty to break the hatches locks.”

Kek asked “So if you got away what are doing here?” The shadow looked over at the group. “I'm here to finish the job and get rid of all witnesses. Thank you once again for all your help.”

### **Act of desperation**

#### **Etan's view**

Dang it! I couldn't get control of my body. The others looked no better. I wasn't sure where the two human crew members were. They may be knocked out somewhere else on the ship. The shadow probably didn't see them as a threat. Unfortunately I was still locked inside myself.

Matt chipped in. “Just hold on for one minute” Matt said to me. “I thought you were being suppressed entirely, I called to you several times now.” I told him.

“Yeah, I know I was protecting your higher brain functions to make sure the insanity would not be permanent.” Matt answered. We made a good team.

“When the Shadow walks us, past Kek, I'll free you for a second. Stumble and fall unto him.” Matt advised. Suddenly I knew what he was up too. Matt you're a genius.

“I know.” Matt said delighted. Sure to his word, as soon as I was near Kek, I could control myself. I did as he had suggested.

I pretended to stumble. In our half drone state this did not look out of sorts. As soon as I touched Kek, Matt let the shadow take back over. We did not want to give away our plan. The shadow only had control over our motor functions, he didn't have total knowledge of all its workings. I inward form changed to a reptilian, but kept the same look as my self on the outside. Now I could also overcome the effects of the collar. It wasn't a powerful version, but I felt myself free up from its control. I let the collar guide my body as before, so he wouldn't notice.

The shadow was behind us guiding our steps. He had us all walking in a straight line. It was taking all its strength to maintain control. Matt sent a secret message to each person informing them of what we were about to do. I reached out with my mind and caused Drax who was in the front of the line to stumble. When the shadow looked over at him, I touched Reaper who was directly in front of me.

I did to him what I had done to me. He touched **1** who was in front of him, and then she touched Drax. I helped the others over come thier collars too. The shadow looked at us suspiciously. I'm not sure what part of our actions it caught. But he kept us moving forward. By the time everyone was transformed we were in the junction room. If the door opened, we would be absorbed in the radiant energy just like Loki had been. Now was the time to act. I powered up and broke us free. **1** and I blasted the door behind us, but it was made to take a lot of abuse, so unfortunately we didn't crack it. If we hadn't been so drained already it probably would have worked.

Just as the shadow taped the open button, Reaper punched something on his tech arm. The raw power of the eternal light came sweeping in. It was like a hot desert wind. By the time, I realized how it felt I wondered why I wasn't dead. Reaper who now looked like he was in great pain, said "you're in the dimensional cloak, get out of here."

I had to carry Reaper who had fallen on the floor. We ran back into the common room. Now that we were all reptilian, the shadow could no longer control us.

It reappeared and said "The chaos guardians are on thier way here, when they get here you will die anyway." Then it disappeared. Reapers life signs were fading. What's wrong with you Reaper?

He looked at me and smirked "I'm still a genius. I used one of the power crystals from an overhead light to reactivate my tech arm. It wasn't enough to power a weapon, but it powered up the controls. I used my own life energy to power the cloak. I made that adjustment a long time ago. In case some smart aleck guardian tried to suppress my arm again."

I had to admit that was genius. Reaper looked at Drax. "Id rather it was him who was dying, but one of us needs to survive. The galaxy needs a Reaper. Make sure you say some really nice things at my funeral or I'll come back to haunt you." Even in death, he has to stroke his own ego.

"Matt give me access to all your stored knowledge, there must be something we can do." I thought.

"No amount of healing will fix this body. The eternal light is claiming it now. He got a momentary hit from it, right before we fully cloaked. It hit him because he was tied into the cloak itself." Matt answered.

There must be something. Wait! I got it. I could form change myself and others. This was just an adaptation to that. More complicated but I thought I could do it.

"You're not going to die. Drax I need your cooperation. I want to combine Reapers memories into yours, minus the ones you're missing also."

Drax kicked back and said "why should I want to do that?"

Reaper looked over at Drax. “You know our list of impossible things?”

Drax shrugged. “Yeah. What of it?”

Reaper smirked “You can scratch off 8 and 10. Not only did I do them while I was gone. But I know how to do them again, anytime I want.” And there's other memories I have you will want.”

Drax was interested “yeah, like what?” I once got swallowed by a fifty foot tall reptilian beast, and then used my blade to cut my way out.”

Drax was impressed, “That’s pretty awesome.” Then he looked at Etan and asked "But will I lose who I am now? I don't want to turn back to him. I like my life now.

I told him no. “ You will retain the separate memories you have now also.”

Drax agreed. “Then let’s do it.”

Now was time for the truth. Could I do this correctly? I need to transfer Reaper memories and integrate them into Drax, without causing a conflict. I took a few deep breaths and focused. I could see Reaper and Drax’s memories like turbulent seas. I had to become the bridge that they could be combined with. I was able to help the process along by concentrating only on the memories from the last five years. Everything before that of course was the same. That narrowed down the job quite a bit.

Now I was down to a task the size of a lake. I took a small amount and let it flow. As I proceeded I could take a little more at time. Two minutes passed and I was almost done. But Reaper’s body would be gone in a matter of seconds. I had no choice but to dump the rest all at the same time. I pulled the rest of the puddle out into Drax with only one second to spare. Reapers body turned into energy and dispersed. Lying on the floor was his tech arm and the elemental bridge chips. After a few seconds they recombined.

Drax opened his eyes and said. “Talk about a head rush.”

I was on pins and needles “how do you feel?”

Drax popped up and asked "How do you think I feel pebbles.”

Drax had never called me that only Reaper had. After scanning him I realized there was a 90 percent integration but some overflow from each version would be left.

“Are you in there too Drax?” I asked.

“Of course, if I can survive Disney land I can survive this too.” The new Reaper/ Drax combo looked at where Reapers body had been and said “I still want my funeral. And you had better say some nice things too.”

Oh brother. “You’re not dead.” I told him. He was being stubborn

“I don’t care the old me is gone. So I want a funeral, and that's that.” He said.

No one could be more stubborn than Reaper and there were two of them powering his will now. Great, that’s just what the universe needs.

## **1's comments**

While Etan was helping Reaper, I tried to revive Kek, but unfortunately he was already too far gone. Onari bodies begin disintegrating as soon as the last breath is breathed. Three good people had died because of the heart of darkness; I hope we can stop it before any others die.

## **The chase**

### **Reaper/drax view**

Once again I had saved the day. What would they do without me? Which I guess is why I did it. The Guardians in all their grandiose abilities still need help from little ole me. My brain was buzzing with activity. Even though Drax and I mostly were the same, there were a few differences. I could see it would take a while for us to meld truly as one. Until then, I guess I would just have to argue with myself.

“Quit narrating to ourselves Reaper. That is annoying. Get on with it.” Drax thought

Great! I thought I just went from an outward ball and chain to an inward one. “I’ll have you know you’re the inward voice. It’s my body.” Drax thought.

“But you’re just a copy of part of the original me. So I’m the alpha Reaper here.” Reaper thought back

Apparently Etan had been listening to our thoughts because he said

“you two quit arguing we need to find a way to get the shadow, and stop it.” I already had the answer, as usual.

“Follow me, old man. Watch and learn.” They all followed me into the control room. Before I got caught, I had time to get a good look at how this craft works. “

“This control module can detach from the rest of the ship. If we separate, we should be able to use the thrusters to catch up with the heart and put it back in the dampening container. Then we go to the edge of the light field, call the mother ship and get another crystal. Then it’s just a matter of fixing this piece of junk and finishing our mission as planned. Another solution brought to you by Reaper and Reaper incorporated.”

“They all looked stunned and impressed. Ahh, that’s the look I live for.” That’s the look we live for, remember.”

“Shut up” toe boy.

The controls turned out to be actually quite simple, well simple for me. My dullard companions might not have gotten it. Etan gave me that look again. With my gear enhancing the ship’s sensors, we located the heart within a few minutes. That little devil was using the maneuvering thrusters to make progress in the stream. He was a good bit ahead of us now. By his speed he would get to the edge before we could catch up. But as always, I had a plan.

Like a real river, the light stream twisted and turned back and forth. There was even a place up ahead where two streams crossed. If I jumped to a higher stream then back down after some turns coming up, I could catch up.

“Hang on” I told them “it’s going to be a bumpy ride.” We were tossed back and forth as we rode the rapids. Though, two of the times I pulled hard on purpose just to send everyone flying, everyone except me.

We made flying leaps from one stream to the other. It reminded me of one of the roller coaster rides I had taken on earth. There was my fighter just below us. Now it was a matter of good aiming. But the shadow got smart and jumped to an even lower stream. This one was smaller and the stream was moving faster in it. We rocked back and forth and did a few tumbles, Drax and I both we having fun now. This was almost as fun as riding the river of acid last year.

I could see the edge of the light barrier coming up. I was almost close enough to dock now, but not quite. He wasn't getting away that easily. I took off my tech hand and put it in the sample tube. The sample tube was used like a smaller version of the junction room. It a small panel that lead to a tube then another panel on other side. I place my hand in the tube, closed the inner door and remotely controlled the hand to attach itself to the out side of the module. After that I had it create a grapple hook to clasp on to the fighter and bring it closer. Victory was mine, and mine.

### **Heart of darkness thoughts**

Those fools. Do they really think they can get me that easily? I simply jettisoned my box along with a few new weapons into space and then blew up the fighter. It pushed the module back enough for me to gain some momentum on them. The chaos guardians were waiting to pick me up. With what I knew and how much power I had obtained, I could change the course of the war forever.

### **Wrapping thing up**

#### **Etans view**

We lost the fighter, but we got picked up by the mother ship. By the time we did, the shadow was gone. The bigger hunt was on. For now though I had stranger task to perform. Sure to his word, Reaper insisted on a funeral for himself. Since I Had the only remaining piece of his original body he wanted to burry the toe. There were actually a great many people there. Some very confused when they saw Reaper. But I had printed out a brochure to explain things, that way I didn't have to explain the same story over and over all day.

Many of us got up and gave testimony to how Reaper changed our life. Not sure if it was real, but he cried at every testimony of himself. The oddest part was when he got up and gave one, to himself. Then he cried when he buried his toe. What a drama queen, I swear.

Later I found out that Drax had insisted they re-assimilate with the elemental bridge. That way Drax kept his link with **1**. In punishment for his interference, Selar altered Drax and Reapers balance so that when a moral issue arose, Drax had the final say so. Drax hadn't shown a problem following Guardian orders but Reaper still did. It was probably because of how I had to rush the mixing of thier memories at the end. Whatever his reasons, Selar left him as he was, with a split personality.

On a different note, no chaos bases or ships had been sighted anywhere in the galaxy. With the shadow loose, we figured it would have them attacking every planet. This was quite odd. Whatever they're planning it must be big. After this adventure I had a few years to take on the easy assignments, but trouble was brewing. In the next few hundred years I meet another evil version of me, a good version of Reaper and that was just how things got started. Later the whole timeline collapsed, mixing up several timelines into one, but that is another story.

## **The End**