

AN ANNOYING PROLOUGE FOR YOU, READER

Okay, let me make this absolutely clear, reader: I don't enjoy writing about my life for idiots.

Now, mind you, I know that it sounds a little harsh, but to be frank, you brought it upon yourselves. I mean, all the stuff that humans are capable of, with war, environmental disasters, politics, religion, the Reign of Anarchy, you get the idea. I mean, who does that? And I have to live with them, for Oblivion's hatred. And if you're wondering if I'm human, then yes I am, kinda (I'll get to that later).

But you morons do make amazing attributions to society I guess, like the hoverlands, the interverse, even all of Olesia is a marvel next to the aspect. But nothing beats human ingenuity more

than the aspect, you know: god, machine, animal, organic... whatever those things are that represent aspects of life. So I guess that makes up for stupidity.

Now, who am I you asked (admit, you did ask at one point)? I'm Liger: brilliant, handsome, all around amazing 18 year old ex nihilo and resident of our city of Olesia. Okay, maybe I exaggerate on the handsome part, but I'm still a lot smarter than your average adult. I guess that's why I'm such a young ex nihilo, or why I can't stand stupidity. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

What you are about to read is true from where I come from. If you have any idea what I am saying, good for you. If you have no clue, well, too bad. You'll learn soon enough (hopefully). Otherwise, let me start my story. If this is someone I do not know, I am sorry about calling you idiotic, it's a bad habit I'm trying to get rid of. If this is Reverent, stop reading, you already know what happens. If this is my stupid boss Trowl, who thought it smart that he passed over his top intern for some has-been, continue reading.

NORMAL LIFE GETS ROBBED

Let me start by saying that it began like any ordinary day, or at least as ordinary as it could be.

I was waiting outside of Trowl's office. He called me in because of some crap disagreement that I had with one of my fellow ex nihilos, even though I was right. Just sitting outside Trowl's office was extremely aggravating and humiliating. Construction workers walked by me down the stone path outside and snickered at me. I glared at them as they walked by.

"You can come in now Liger," I heard Trowl say. I got up and stepped into the trailer. It had simple blue walls with a symbol of the Vanguard army on the wall and an oak desk with a wooden

chair in front of it. A small halo tree was on the left while a touch screen was to the right.

Trowl was a heavy-set man with graying tawny hair. He had brown eyes and tan skin. His hands were big and coarse but nimble from his work as an ex nihilo. But I can see that, unlike most ex nihilos, he had been in the Vanguard. Trowl looked at me sternly. He was not smiling. "So, Liger, here we are in this predicament."

"So it seems," I said.

"Let's review," said Trowl. "You got into an argument, again, with Rea about structure and filaments for a hoverland at your station..."

"Oh, come on!" I exclaimed.

"And you disobeyed Rea when she asked you to begin..."

"Bullcrap! Her idea for a hoverland is completely stupid and slow. Rea is an idiot just like the rest of them," I said. "I'm a better ex nihilo than all of them. Why don't you just admit that--"

"You are NOT an ex nihilo, Liger! You are an intern, nothing more, nothing less," Trowl said. "You should consider

yourself lucky to even be at Station Q12, especially for someone of your... upbringing."

"Oh, so because I'm poor and not a rich brat like all of them, I have to nose up to those lugheads?" I proclaimed. "Let me become one. You know I'm better at this than all the interns. You've seen what I can do for the hoverlands. For Salvation's aspect, let me do this!"

Trowl paused for a second and looked me over, like he could figure me out. He lifted his touch screen with the top of his right hand. "You want to know why I won't make you one, here's why," said Trowl. "Bring up and read Liger's psych profile."

"Finding... Finding....," the touch screen responded. Nothing like hearing a computer's droning voice while waiting for the yearly psych review. "Found. Liger of Wu District. Psych test shows exceptional intellect and ingenuity. But not recommended for work placement."

"Why?" asked Trowl, the tone of his voice indicating that he already knew the answer.

"Psych results show that although intelligence is high, student exhibits antisocial tendencies, which are not limited to

narcissism. With the result of two physical altercations between other members of the workspace in the past month and multiple disagreements with instructors, suggest continued placement as student until problems are solved or, if problems continue, work termination."

"Oblivion be damned!" I exclaimed. "So if I don't socialize with dimwits, then I get canned? Really?!"

"Yes," Trowl concluded. "When you're in my position, if you're ever in my position, how will you hire calculators, material alchemists--"

"I can manage all that on my own."

"Fellow ex nihilos to help!" Trowl exclaimed. He paused, took a deep breath, and continued. "I know you're a genius, and I know you're in a rough financial position. I admit that. But, you have to be a team player when doing this. You can't conquer the world on your own."

I wanted to say something back, but I was at a loss for words. As much as I hated to admit it, he was right. "You can leave now, the work day is over," said Trowl. I left Trowl's office.

Outside his office bigger halo trees were hovering above the ground near the path next to Trowl's trailer. I walked down the path and saw ex nihilos wearing gloves as they shaped space spires for the hoverlands; sticking hands into the space chambers and soothing those equations and energy. Get it right and the many colored and creative structures will float for many years. Get it wrong, reader... you don't want to get it wrong.

I got off of the path onto the rail path. I was leaning against the clear, energy rail as I stood on the solid crystal rail path. I looked out across our city of Olesia. If you ever ride the rail path to Wu District, then look out to the right and you can see the whole city, surrounded by silver walls that are shaped into a bowl, with a city of stone, brick and concrete spires that sit inside the bowl and barely reaching the tip of the wall. Above the wall there are hoverlands that cover the entire sky of the bowl, letting only few leaks of light drip in. But I've seen this scene a million times and leaned my back on the silver wall. I closed my eyes and began to think about my argument with Trowl.

Reader, I know you probably think of me as some egotistical prick, but I was right. Trowl and Rea were morons to

think that I'm wrong. Okay, maybe they're not morons, but I was still right. You have to be right in life! But being antisocial, a narcissist, really? So yeah, I don't have any friends, and yes, it seems like I don't want any. But it's not like I don't try to make friends. It's just that I'm, uh, how do you say, not an easy person to be with. But, I can guarantee that I am definitely not a narcissist. To be a narcissist would mean that I don't have self-loathing.

The sky was full of beautiful hoverbuilds with meshed hoverlands surrounding them that let light from the sun leak in. A ball suddenly came bouncing near my feet; a small, red toy that nestled on my right foot. I looked in the direction from where it came from and saw a little girl, six or seven probably, dressed in red boots and a Prophet's hooded overcoat, looking at me with wide, bashful eyes. I picked up the ball with my foot, began to bounce the ball on it, and then let it land on my head. I balanced the ball, moving my head, and then bounced it off my head and to the girl. She caught it, looking astonished. I waved to her and smiled, and she giggled back in response. She then ran off in the opposite direction to the other Prophets from Wu. I gazed forward, and saw home.

I live in Olesia's Wu District. Yes, I know the Prophets from Wu can get a bit overbearing with odd worshipping of Salvation, but it's pretty nice. Not as nice as Jaeger District, but still nice for poor, simple folk. Short, cracked, multi-colored stoned buildings with shabby metal roofs lined streets with trade and religion all around. There were some signs of the aspect Valor around, like an eagle here or there, or a word like honor or loyalty scrawled in green graffiti. A giant white and red temple for the Prophets sat smack in the middle of where I lived, noisy with its constant chanting and proclaiming of the new message of Salvation. Frankly, it just keeps me up at night, reader.

I was walking down my cobbled street when I bumped into two girls and made them drop the groceries they were carrying from a market stand. They were both very pretty, and they both looked pissed. "Watch it, asshole!"

"You watch it!" I yelled back. What? They should have been watching where they walked instead of being so wrapped up in their conversation.

A couple of minutes later, as I'm walked past a Prophet's temple near the end of the market, some Prophets from Wu

approached me. They were carrying a charity box and clearly wanted to ask me for money. Another one of those dumbass charities.

Before they could say anything, I waved my hand in front of them and said, "Not interested, you religious hacks." What? It's my money, I earned it, and I was not going to give some lazy, drug addicted homeless man money to buy more vincer.

Speaking of the homeless, as I walked down the abandoned alleyway to my home, I saw hoodlums beating a homeless man. Wu's okay, but it's not without its fair share of problems. I've seen these hoods before, always tightroping (for a reader that lives outside of Wu, that's Wu jargon for using the drug vincer). But I never saw the hobo before, although I didn't know a lot of people in Wu (did I mention I did not have any friends).

"Hey, morons!" I called out to them. They turned around, the white in their pulsing eyes orange. "So, uh, I hear your mom uh... is so stupid that she thinks Salvation would help her." What? Just because I'm a jerk and not a fan of the homeless doesn't mean I'm going to leave one in the hands of bullies.

That got their attention and they turned around, looking slightly decayed. They ran towards me and I did not get far when one of them tackled me and started beating the crap out of me. The others joined in and soon it's a scene of feet and fists. I balled up and felt myself being turned into a human ragdoll. Thankfully, tightropers have the attention span of squirrels, and they quickly ran off. I got up, uttering grunts of pain.

I limped towards the huddled homeless man, still clenching my teeth in pain. I was about to say something when the hobo suddenly ran off. That quickly, he was gone.

“You're welcome, asshole,” I yelled. This was another reason why I hate the homeless, and why I don't have friends. Either a person was a moron, or, in this case, a jerk. Where in Prodigy was the Vanguard when you needed them? And why in Salvation's might would you just run off when someone just helped you? The ass. I limped toward home and discovered that my currency is gone, making a horrible day even worse.

A few minutes later I got back home to my crud of a house, slanted, rusty, but still with its smooth, grey stone walls. The roof was crooked, leaning to the right, and the windows were jagged

pieces of glass. The door, if you can call it that, was just a scab of wood. Inside there was one room combining the kitchen and a living room with a wobbly table and a lumpy couch, and another smaller room that held my bed and desk. Sounds terrible, I know, but it's my crap of a home.

Oh great, now my annoying neighbor Karolyn was coming out of her house. She lived right next door to me, and for some reason she wanted to look out for me, like I can't take care of myself. The moron. Karolyn's blonde head reached up to my shoulder. She has a round, pretty face that seemed to like to smile. Her dark eyes look concerned, and she ran over.

"Salvation's blessing, what happened?" Karolyn tried to bring her hand up to my face, but I swiped it away. "Are you okay?"

Karolyn tried to bring her hand up again, but I again swiped it away. "Do I look okay?" I asked sarcastically. I pushed her aside while meanly demanding, "Leave me alone!"

"I'm just trying to help," Karolyn said, trying once again to put her idiotic hand on me.

I turned around, got in her face and snarled, "I don't need help, you stupid bitch!" I went inside and slammed my scab of a door loudly.

I instantly regretted what I said when I heard the sound of weeping and her door closing. What's wrong with me, reader? Karolyn was clearly trying to help. But she should have known that I would get pissed off at her. Ah, well. She'll probably forget this tomorrow and grovel over me again.

I slowly lay down, only to realize that I was hungry and painfully got back up. I walked to my fridge and found some leftover soggy tofu and rice. Not the most gourmet food, but still something. Plus, it's all I could afford on welfare. I grabbed my small laptop, turn on the interverse, and sat down at the table to eat while watching some TV.

Reader, there is something that I realized: I haven't described a single thing about my appearance. Now, just imagine that I standing in front of a mirror right now, got it? I'm the guy who is the pale, lean, 6 foot tall, 18-year-old. I have black hair, flattened, that's sometimes in my face. I have a natural white highlight on the left side near my ear, a sharp chin, slender face,

flattened nose, curved eyebrows. But the most unique aspect of my features are: my purple eyes. Yes ladies, purple. And gentlemen, I guess.

Although my eyes looked less intense with my bruised face. After I finished eating I went into my bedroom and took off my armored leather vest and my long sleeve cotton shirt. I had a bluish bruise on the right side of my rib cage, and my right leg was killing me. I've got a black and blue mark on my tummy and my right shoulder looks swollen. My nose had bits of blood dripping out and my lip is bleeding. Pretty much the entire right half of my face hurts. I took out some medicine from the cabinet and cleaned my wounds.

I put on sleeping shorts and a pajama shirt and sat back down at the kitchen table. I continued to watch more TV until it got dark outside. But before I went to bed, I brought up the search engine and typed a name. Still no search result found, not in Olesia or in any other known city. Reader, if you're wonder who I searched for, don't. I don't want to talk about it.

As I lay in my bed I looked over to where photos were supposed to be. You want to know why I don't have any? One,

photos were not for people who have terrible memories and can't even remember their own family. And two, photos were for people with families. Yeah, I'm an orphan. Big deal. People in the Radish district had it a lot worse. Look, let's move past it okay, I don't want to talk about it.

The next day, I was walking back home from work, again. Same time every day. It was a normal day full of the normal morons of the ex nihilos, and I made sure not to comment on the obviously wrong way that Rea was teaching us. I was in my yard when I saw my scab of a door knocked over. Either the wind somehow, after all these years, blew it down, or I was being robbed. Where was Karolyn to call the Vanguard? I looked next door and saw that her lights were off. Idiot! I ran into my house and barged in. This part, reader, is when my normal life got weird.

I came into my house to find that my kitchen table was down on its side on the floor. There was a man sprawled near it. I ran to him and knelt down, turning him over. But, as I looked into the man's face, I realized that the guy looked very familiar. He was filthy and wore ragged clothing. He had a dirty blanket over him

and a dirty face. Pretty much everything about the man was dirty.

It was that hobo who had not thanked me for rescuing him.

The homeless man's face looked hollow. He had pale grey, almost colorless eyes below flattened straw-colored hair. His skin, covered with dirt, looked like it had been pink once, but now it looked like spoiled meat. He even smelled like spoiled meat. I noticed blood seeping from his left side. Thank fortune of Salvation that Dirge's talons didn't grab him.

"The l-lion... the l-l-lion," the man was trying to say.

"Just hold still," I said. His wound was bleeding profusely. I put my hand on it but the man just pushed it away. I tried again but he kept pushing it away. That's when I saw Dirge, perched on the knocked over kitchen table, it's crow-raven-like body glowing with a soft black light of technology embedded in the flesh and feathers. It made a mechanical squawk at me. Usually you would never see Dirge unless you were dying, or someone near you was dying. Reader, I'm sure that you have seen Dirge somehow when a loved one was dying. But for me, this was the first time I ever saw this aspect.

"Go away," I said, angrily waving my arm. "He's still alive. Shoo."

"W-wait, j-just wait...," the man shakily breathed out. I looked back towards his face. He grabbed my arm and looked excited. "F-final-l-ly, I f-f-found you."

I was confused. "What?"

"Oooh, finally, s-so long. You, creator?"

"What?" I asked again. "Um, yeah I'm an ex nihilo..."

"N-no, you're meant for the power... s-st-top the Lion...," the man continued. He started breathing heavily and quickly and said, "Vida!"

"What? What? What is it?" I asked urgently.

"M-my name. Vida," he said. "You, you, you have to..."

"I don't understand," I said. "Please, you need to rest."

"It's c-coming," the man, Vida, said. He pulled down my head until my left ear was near his mouth. "The Lion, he w-wants to ups-s-set balance... eat away at it, his of-ff-f-spring. Then, then... the Tiger... she w-will be f-f-fight. And he will h-have his heaven."

"I don't understand." I said. "Please, you need to rest, you need a hospital--"

Dirge made a loud mechanical squawk, as if to say he was impatient. "Shut up!" I yelled at it.

"Go t-to the Limen T-t-tutoris that leads outside. By now Ol-lesia should b-b-be around Phantasm-m-magoria. Get t-to N-Netot. It's a-alread-dy too late f-for m-me. The Inquisitors m-made s-sure of th-that." Vida then turned my face towards his injury, and then toward his face. "When creating your bridge, find stable ground to keep it balanced."

Vida closed his eyes and began to disintegrate into a multi-colored dust. Yes, reader, disintegrate! It was both beautiful and terrifying to watch it unfold as everything, from Vita's body, clothes, even the dirt and blood, everything, disappeared in a rainbow ash. It blew away from me as quickly as I saw it. He was gone, along with Dirge.

I didn't have time to comprehend what I just saw and heard before I felt an itching sensation on my forearm. The itching turned into a burning as I fell to the floor, writhing in pain. It felt as if my whole body was being stabbed with cold, sharp needles, and my forearm felt like it was peeling away like a cocoon revealing a

butterfly. Suddenly the pain subsided, and a black mark was on my forearm. I did not get a good look at it before I passed out.

A STRANGE, CREATED DAY

I woke up with the sound of my alarm clock, the sound of my normal life changing.

As I got up I figured that I had a bad dream, a nightmare maybe. I got up and yawned. I stretched, and winced as parts of my body still hurt. Then, I realized that I was still wearing my armored Velcro vest, my short-sleeved t-shirt, and my brown work pants and work boots. My kitchen table was still flipped over. Oblivion be damned.

The black mark was still on my forearm. It was 5 to 6 inches in size and glowed like a computer screen. It looked like a swirling storm of black and blue that formed into a roaring cat-like face. At both the top and bottom of the face were zigzagging lines that came to blue sword-shaped crystal points. One point extended to my wrist while the other point ended at the crook of my arm. What a strange thing to see when you feel like you're hungover, reader.

As I stared at the symbol, I realized that my alarm was still going off. Oh, crap! I was going to be late! I quickly took off my vest and shirt and put on a long sleeved one. Usually I would fold my long-sleeves up to my elbow joint, but I undid the strap on my right sleeve to make that it covered my tattoo-thingy. I quickly grabbed my vest and ran out the scab door, putting it on as I ran.

Station Q12 overlooked the southwest side of Olesia on top of a hill. The morning was sunny and cheerful, but I was not. I barely made it to my class' hover stand station before Rea was finished her droning, moronic speech about what to do, what not to do, yada yada yada. The rest of the idiots, or I guess you could call them my classmates, weren't even listening to Rea. They were yapping about the next party, or how much money their parents had, or even where the best place was to get vincer. And this is our city's future?

Rea was an average looking women, nothing special about her. Mousey hair, dull grey eyes, thin face. She was, of course, standing near the creation pod to build the hoverbuild. And she still looked and sounded stupid. Reader, if you're wondering why I just don't leave and transfer Stations, I CAN'T AFFORD TO! Remember, too poor. I'm only here because of a lottery ticket.

After Rea finished droning, she said, "We are going to begin with a student showing how an ex nihilo creates a simple hoverland building that can float. Liger, why don't you show us, since you seem to be the 'expert' of the class."

Everybody snickered knowing full well that Rea and I were constantly at odds with each other, and that I was the kid in the group, the youngest. I reached into my pocket to get out my gloves when I realized that I had left them at home. Idiot! Could this day get any worse?

Wait a minute reader. Suddenly I felt something on my hands and lifted them up. Fortune for Salvation, they're gloves! But not my normal, sickly green, itchy, worn out gloves that I've had since I was fifteen. No, these were nice looking, strong, with a lush and vibrant green and grey color. They fit me damn comfortably too, as if they were a second skin. Where did these come from?

I ignored the question for now and got up to the hover station's hand gates. I put my hands in and felt the sudden warmth of a magical energy flowing in my fingertips. I mashed and pressed the energy and the hoverbuild began to form. It was elongated with a flat top and an unattractive plaster coating to it. What it needed was a fresh coat of grey stone and a nicer pointed top.

Suddenly, the hoverbuild started to change into what I imagined. I heard everyone in the class gasp in amazement at the spectacle. I wonder? I looked at the magic equation in my hands and using this energy imagined the hoverbuild's shape to be wider and sharper. The equation formed and the building changed along with it.

Now it was time to get creative. I began adding, taking away, and reshaping equations as the building reformed. I molded a unique stand equation within the hover station's energy and my creation floated towards the rest of the hoverlands. It had gone from a boring point into a smooth stoned sword that could pierce the heavens above. It would join the rest of the hoverlands and house some of Olesia's aspects.

Rea's mouth gaped open. "W-well, that was, uh, impressive Liger. Now why don't we let another person try. Kasper?"

Oh no, not that idiot. Kasper was just some rich hack from the Foudre District whose dad had a lot of money. Kasper was a big fellow, taller than me. He was a bit chubby, but deceptively strong. Trust me reader, I know because I've felt his strength. He had beady green eyes and short blonde hair on a big, pudgy face.

"Step aside, ladies, step aside. The master is in the house," he said..

"Oh, come on!" I said. "Rea, don't let this tomato head do it. He's horrible at it. Let me continue, I'm the best of all--"

“Enough Liger,” said Rea.

“Yeah, shut it, Ms. L,” Kasper said, grinning as I clenched my teeth. Reader, if you're wondering what this insult means, let's just say it involved a prank involving me wearing a dress and a lot of makeup.

“Yeah, let Kas do it now,” another person said.

“Kasper, Kasper, Kasper,” they all cheered.

Kasper began to move his hands within the magical energy. A hoverbuild started to bubble from the top of the hover station. It was made of gold, jewels, and other forms of moronic prettiness. And it sure as Dirge did not look stable. But things got a lot worse when the singing began.

Everyone heard the singing coming from the back and saw that a group of the Prophets from Wu had formed behind all of us and began singing their little prayer for my hoverbuild as it floated upward. Everyone started to get annoyed, especially Kasper. He removed his left hand from the hover station and yelled, “Yo, shut up for Oblivions silence. I'm trying to work here.”

Kasper should not have done that, reader. The hoverbuild suddenly tipped to the left. As it fell, it got everyone's attention, including mine. The Prophets continued their chant. But I suddenly heard a bouncing noise. I turned and saw a red ball bouncing towards the falling hoverbuild, and a small Prophet with red boots following it. No, no, that little girl!

“Hey, look! HEY!!” I tried calling out but everyone was too busy staring at Kasper's failed creation. I tried running through my class but everyone was packed in too tightly. I pushed through harder to get to the girl. I made it past the group and the little girl was in my sights. But she was too far away. She was going to get crushed! I was going to fail her, and the Prophets,

and everyone here if I didn't save her. She had to be protected from the falling hoverbuild, or I'd fail!

"NOO!!" I screamed, and it all happened very fast.

Something just burst out near the girl as the hoverbuild was falling onto her, like some sort of flower. It took the impact of the hoverbuild breaking it into pieces and chunks. The girl fell onto her bottom in surprise and looked in awe at the shield that appeared. It was a jumbled mess of multi-colored crystals, 12 feet high, but its shape looked like it was specifically shaped to protect her. A female Prophet, likely her mom, kissed her and praised Salvation for her safety. Everyone was looking at the crystal-like barrier. I couldn't believe what had just happened. As everyone stared at my work, I snuck away before anyone noticed that Valor, perched on a twirling halo tree, was peering down at me. It's glowing green tech eyes beamed at me as if to say it was proud that I protected that girl. But all I could think of as I looked at the eagle with metal feathers was how freaking scary this was. I quickly got myself out of there.