

Lone Knight:

The smell of meat over fire wafted through the air around him, embracing him with a promise of a full stomach and one less meal to worry about. Grass crunched beneath his metal boots as he counted his quarry. He had slain six of the yellow, furred beasts, enough to feed his whole outpost of companions. Lifting one of his felled prey over his shoulder, he tried to recall the names of the brown nosed animals. Wolverers; Pain shot through his skull and a great weight pressed against his head, as if gravity came down upon him. Raising an armored gauntlet to his helm in reaction to the pain, Rokusho paused a moment before it quickly subsided. Every time he tried to remember who he was, or what his life was like before he awoke to his current home, a splitting pain rendered his ability to think useless. He couldn't even recall his full name, but adopted the title Rokusho, as it was the only name he could remember.

All he had to keep him grounded, to give him any sense of self, of being, were his blade, a powerful weapon, and his trusty shield. It's blue hilt worn but its blade still sharp and able, the sword contained a bluish hue glowing in a line down the silver blade. Not just a deadly weapon, but more of an extension of his arm. He knew the weight and balance of the sword perfectly. The Leviathan Blade, just another figment of his shattered past, but one that had helped him survive. A clank beneath his feet snapped Rokusho out of his reverie, he had arrived at the elevator. His home was a mystery to Rokusho yet, its many depths and elevators, as well as the vastly different climates between them puzzled him, but he had learned long ago that no answers would come. Idle thoughts soon came to him as the elevator descended.

"He cannot stay. Once his memory returns he will become what all of his kind are, an enemy."

"I agree, his being here will only bring ruin to the Tenderfoot tribe."

"He has been with us for many cycles now, and has proven useful. We have hunted together, ate together, traveled together. He has learned our language, and forgotten his own."

"He speaks the truth, Rokusho is a powerful ally, and can prove instrumental in our take over of the Haven. We only need to make him one of us, make him see them as enemies too."

"Do not grow attached, King Tinkinzar tolerates his existence in our tribe, but only if he continues to prove his worth."

"Here he comes now, Greaz, go and greet him."

Relief escaped in a sigh as Rokusho approached the outpost, the feel of metal beneath his feet comforted him, gave him a familiar feeling. A smile grew on his face as he saw Greaz approaching. Greaz found him when he first came back to consciousness, and brought him to the place he had come to call home. At first, Rokusho couldn't speak with his savior, for Greaz

spoke a language he couldn't understand. Slowly, he had learned the dialect, and after weeks of adventuring together, with Greaz teaching him about the clockwork they lived within and imparting knowledge of the gremlin's language and history, they had become the best of friends. Gremlins, that's what his hosts were. They both had two arms, and two legs, a torso and a chest, but their heads stopped the similarities between them. As did the color of their skin and clothing. No one else wore the full body of armor Rokusho had, a second skin that he never removed. They were truly different, but the gremlins were all he had, and he didn't mind that one bit.

"Rokusho, how goes the hunt? What delicious meal do you return with today?"

"Hello Greaz, and only the best. Wolver meat, though I have taken the liberty of eating one myself."

"Wolver you say, come Rokusho, we shall have a great feast tonight in the name of the King!"

The two bumped heads together, and both grinned at each other. Within the gremlin race, bumping heads showed trust, and friendship between two gremlins. "Oh, but first, the council would like to see you," Greaz told his friend. Rokusho and Greaz traversed across the outpost grounds and bowed before five gremlins: four wizened and old gremlins, two on each side of a mightier, larger gremlin, one with piercing eyes of crimson: eyes that seemed to take in everything at once, nothing escaping their scope, eyes that matched the crimson cloak he wore. Coming down to one knee, Rokusho bowed his head.

"Greetings council, and greetings Saldron, it is an honor to come before you." Rokusho kept his head low and voice humble as he addressed the leaders of the tribe.

"Greetings Rokusho, You have grown much since the Tenderfoot have taken you in. You speak the gremlin language well, and show proper respect to the council, and me, of the crimson order."

"I thank you, Tenderfoots, you have given me both a home, and a purpose of living."

"Yes. Yes. King Tinkinzar sends word of a grand plan against the Haven, and you have a great importance of it, are you prepared?"

"The Haven my lord? But I have been forbidden to even go near that accursed ground."

"There is reason for that, but I think it's due time to tell you what you are, and how you have been saved. Your life is here with us, your loyalty to the Tenderfoot undying, yes?"

"Yes my lord."

"Well then, Rokusho... the tru-" Saldron's words were cut short as the ground beneath them rocked, vibrations coursing through the metal. "No, it can't be. Assemble the warriors and send them to the eastern end of the outpost, Greaz, gather up the menders and take their helm, you will lead them and make sure as many of us live as the enemy die. The scorchers should be on their way once their equipment is readied. War has come to the tenderfoot. Rokusho, do not

stray, go and hide in your home and do not leave, that is a direct order from your chief.” The council dispersed as did Greaz. A symphony of yells and shouts, bedlam and chaos filled the air with a stagnant atmosphere. Rokusho ran to his home and quickly went inside. He did not like being kept from the front lines, while his home faced danger and his friends were at risk, but he could not disobey a direct order.

Explosions rocked the air, and outside of his home Rokusho could see fire and electricity flaring through the sky, as if the elements themselves were angry and looking for blood. His hand went down to his side and grasped the hilt of Leviathan. As the cries of his friends rang through the air, his body began to tremble. Not from fear, no, it shook from anger. “I can’t just wait here any longer!” Drawing his blade he burst out of his house, and dashed towards the nearest sign of battle. The fires had done their deed; the outpost was glassed, and the flames raged evermore. Fury rose within him as he saw the fallen bodies of the gremlins. Judging from the amount of those slain, Rokusho knew this was no battle, but a massacre. Glass crunched as Rokusho's boots stepped down on vials shattered across the grounds. A cry to his right diverted his attention. “No...”

Blood streaming from a nasty wound in his shoulder, Greaz staggered towards Rokusho. A smile not suited for his dire situation found itself on his face as he approached his eternal friend. “I knew you would never stay put Rokusho, how could you.” Leaning on his steamworks axe, Greaz stumbled to the ground. “Always the rule breaker.” Cold, his body began to feel unnaturally cold. “Is this it for the great Gremlin Greaz?” The earth began to swallow him up as he felt himself fall toward the floor, but his descent stopped short. Warmth surrounded him as Rokusho caught him, the heated metal of his friend's armor fighting back the cold.

“Greaz... no no no, please no. You can't let this happen. Not after all the battles we've been through! The Great Gremlin Greaz and the wanderer Rokusho right? The unbeatable team?” Body quivering in pain, Greaz wondered what death would feel like. Rokusho gently laid him down to the floor, and Greaz felt moisture fall onto his face. “You're the only true friend I have, I don't care about my past, all I know is the present. You fool, stop playing around!” Relief and happiness filled Greaz upon hearing those words, but a pang of guilt and regret also accompanied the feelings.

“Rokusho... we've... I've lied to you. You need to know the truth.” Fishing into his pockets, Greaz pulled out a locket in the shape of the energy symbol, a circle with a line in the middle, its blue glow lighting up both he and his friend's face. Blood stained the locket, and in that blood a grim story was told. “The Crimson Order... they've been using you. We have wronged you, and never have I forgave myself for the atrocious sin we've committed. We may be a vicious race, but we are not so different from any other being alive.” Greaz spoke with a calm in his voice, his eyes showing the pain he felt, not from his fatal wounds, but from what he was about to say. “Know that you are one of the Tenderfoot, the tribe and I, we all think of you

as a friend and ally, and to me, you are the only family I have, ever since they were slain by the Spiral Knights." Darkness began to seep to the edges of his vision.

"Don't speak Greaz, just concentrate on living, we'll get a mender an-"

"No!" Greaz's arm shot up and grabbed Rokusho's helmet at the opening, his voice showing a clarity and even anger as he shouted, "no, you must listen." Rokusho quieted at the his friend's final request. "We did not find you alone. You were with two others, you had set up a small camp in Depth 3. The King's orders. We... we.." Greaz felt tired, more tired than ever before. Then, the cold ceased, as did the pain, and a promise of great relief swept through him. "The locket." Arms moving without hesitation, without pain, Greaz placed the locket into his friend's opened hand. Once again a smile grew on his face. "S'long Rokusho. Goodbye friend." The world went black.

With Greaz fallen in his arms, Rokusho's body filled with anger. Rage consumed his heart, his mind, his body. "I'll be back, old friend." After laying the gremlin in a nearby ruin, he picked Leviathan up and sheathed the deadly sword. And then he ran. No particular direction in mind, he ran toward any place that promised him carnage. Everywhere destruction maimed the once intact area, but Rokusho did not grieve; all of his energy and being was focused on one thing. Revenge. Figures ahead caught his eye, two humanoid silhouettes partially obscured by a smokescreen. Something about them resonated in his thoughts, but a red wall of anger drove any other musings from his head. Leviathan appeared in his hand as if it had been there the whole time, as any who saw him draw it would miss it if they blinked.

Right shoulder in, Rokusho drove into the back of the first figure. Honor proved nothing to Rokusho, and only the death of his friend made attacking an enemy from the back no problem. Leviathan gutted through his enemies upper torso, and as heat was drawn from his prey's body, the blue hue of his blade glowed a crimson red. The now dead enemy's companion drew back at the sight of his partner's demise, and pulled his rifle out of its holster. Drawing a bead on Rokusho, the enemy hesitated after seeing what was in his sights. That hesitation cost him his life. Rokusho burst forward in a flurry of attacks. The first downward chop sheared the rifle in two, leaving his foe defenseless. The following slice barbed the foe's shoulder, a wicked wound that rendered the arm beneath it lifeless. Driving in before his target could retreat and gather any semblance of defense, Rokusho brought his blade down in a double handed slice, cutting deep into the enemy's upper body in a finishing blow.

Sounds of footsteps against the metal ground warned the vengeful warrior of enemy reinforcements. Fury still guided Rokusho's hand, and toward the footfalls he dashed. Four targets burst around the corner of a metal gate used to divide the outpost from the rest of the clockwork's floor. The first unfortunate soul to come around the edge of the gate met Rokusho's

wrath, as he bashed his shield into the foe's face, a sickening crunch emitting from the contact. A thrust from another of the enemy warrior's rapier soared towards Rokusho's face, an attack that would certainly kill the warrior. Parrying the jab with Leviathan, the lone fighter slapped aside the thin sword and kicked out with his left foot, catching his attacker in the gut. A quick slice to the neck between the seams of the doubled over warrior's armor finished him.

The final two opponents drew their curved blades and shields and positioned themselves so as to pincer Rokusho from the left and right. On came the foe on the right, thrusting and stabbing with his sword, trying to distract from his companion, who advanced from the left with a powerful swipe. Rokusho slammed down on the left's blade with his shield, stealing the momentum from the swing, while simultaneously batting away blows from his right with Leviathan. With the enemy on the left's weapon down low, the lone fighter brought up his shield to the exposed helmet of the knight, dizzying him momentarily. He grabbed the stunned foe by the neck and pulled him towards his attacker on the right. Ceasing the onslaught to avoid slamming into his friend, the enemy knight pulled back and tried to catch his companion. Rokusho took full advantage of the respite, and with a powerful thrust stabbed both the knight's in tandem, drawing their heat into his blade as the lights of their eyes faded.

How many were there left? How many lives were left to take? Thoughts of this nature floated within Rokusho's mind, though deep down he knew satisfaction would never come from the bloodshed he had, and would no doubt continue to commit. Rubbing the locket Greaz had given him around his neck, the angered knight hunted for his next target. Suddenly his leg was swept outward and he tumbled to the ground, feeling as if someone had punched his thigh. A burning sensation shot up his leg as he realized he had been shot by a bullet of pure energy.

"That's enough. No more will my men die to your blade rogue. You, who are a traitor to your own kind." Deep and resonant, a piercing voice met Rokusho's ears.

"My... own kind?" Somehow, Rokusho understood the words of his attacker. It sounded so foreign, yet, so familiar at the same time. How could he understand them? Then Pandora's box opened, as if the secrets of the whole event sprang to Rokusho's mind. With unguided fury subsiding, he surveyed the ones he killed. They were knights, this much he knew. Warrior's who wielded sword and shield; but, they looked just as he did. Their bodies, their faces, their armor. They were his people. "Why? Why have you attacked my friends?" He muttered, asking no one in particular.

The shooter raised his gun and looked at Rokusho quizzically. Red as the scales of a salamander, a helmet which donned the look of such a lizard rested atop the shooter's head, and the rest of his armor took on a red color, as did the fiery blade with a jagged edge sheathed as his hip. "You speak Gremlin? How? I cannot understand you knave. Have you been living with these animals?" Holstering his gun the shooter stalked toward Rokusho. "Wait, that locket... it cannot be. Is that you? Tyrael?"

Rokusho's mind whirled. Flashes of memory shot through his head, and he couldn't sort out the inundation of thoughts, the stream of pure consciousness. Body stiffened, mind in disarray, Rokusho reflexively threw out his shield as if to protect himself from a great threat that came only from within. "Tyrael? It's me, Arc. Where have you been all this time? Everyone at Haven thought you lost after the gremlin raids. You were attacked. By this same tribe of gremlins." The fiery knight took cautious steps towards Rokusho, open palms outstretched to prove he meant no harm. Two other knights arrived, swords brandished, pointed at the lone, confused knight. "Stand down men! That's an order.!" Arc barked at them.

"But sir, this rogue spiral knight has slain many o-"

"Silence your tongue or I'll do it for you. This here is an old friend. Now spread out and survey the area for survivors. Give any injured knights vitapods and mine any crystals you find and prepare for evac."

"SIR!"

With the other knights gone, Arc continued to speak to Rokusho. "Do you remember now Tyrael? You were on a mining expedition with your family; it was at a high depth so we all thought it would be a cakewalk. You brought along Janna, your wife. And... your son. Do you remember your young knight? Always the stalwart little warrior. Rokusho. That was his name." Arc spoke these words softly, while Rokusho, like a wild animal growled at him with fangs, or sword, bared. "They... they're gone Tyrael. Slain, both of them. It was... ruthless. By the time I got there it was too late. Janna... young Rokusho. Both of them. No mercy."

"We searched for you for months," Arc continued, "but we could not find any trace of you. But we did find out one thing, the name of your attackers. The Tenderfoots." Rokusho bristled at the mention of his friends... enemies? Names. Leviathan fell to the floor with a clatter and its owner raised both hands to his head, clutching at it. "We planned this raid to get revenge, to avenge your family. And here you are, living with the murderers themselves. They are not your family, your friends. You are not one of them. Janna, she would've been sad to see you like this; And young Rokusho... he was not yet five." Arc placed his hand gently on Rokusho's shoulder. "Tyrael. Come back."

Fire burned through Rokusho's head. Memories of his time with Greaz and the Tenderfoot, and blurred memories of his family. He didn't know what to believe. Whether Arc's words were that of an angel or a devil. "ENOUGH!" Rokusho's yell burst from his lungs, but not in the gremlin language. "That. Is. Enough." No longer would he listen to the words of this mysterious knight. Grasping the hilt of Leviathan he lunged at Arc. Stabbing out, his thrust was deflected by the powerful sword of the enemy.

"Stop Tyrael, this is foolish!" Flames licked at Rokusho's body, as Arc's weapon emitted and encased itself in a fiery maelstrom. Pressing on forward, Rokusho slashed out diagonally to the right, and hitting nothing but air, deftly redirected the blade in a curved arc towards his foe's leg. Arc leaped up above the slice, and kicked out with his left foot, connecting the blow to

Rokusho's helm, knocking him back. "You cannot defeat me, you should know this." A guttural growl escaping from his mouth, like a beast the vengeful warrior charged the Salamander armored knight. Unlatching the clasps of his shield, he spun around and launched it at Arc. Lowering his body to the ground, he grasped Leviathan in both hands and dashed behind the flying shield. "Parlor tricks." Arc raised his gun and shot the shield, the force of the bullet flipping the shield upward and out of his way. Having cleared that threat, Arc brought the weapon down to disable Rokusho, lined his sights ahead, only to find his target wasn't there. Rokusho had used the shield as a feint, a way to get within striking distance unseen. He slashed upward from underneath Arc, aiming to shear him in half.

The skillful Arc dodged at a hair's breadth, Leviathan piercing through the red armor and barbing him in the chest. "Hmm. You have gotten a bit better since the day we first met, and through the days we fought together to survive on this planet and find a way home. But..." Arc tossed aside his gun and sheathed his fiery sword. "You have thrown away all it means to be a knight, and have befriended fiends such as these. You are a beast, and a threat to all of Haven. You are Tyrael no more." A yellow light flashed from Arc's blade, a golden aura surrounding his crouched body, one hand on the sheath of his blade, the other on the hilt. Energy hummed through the air and a crushing gravity swept through the ground, denting the metal. "I'll respect you as a former friend and finish this quickly. You will fall to the spirit of this knight."

Rokusho's body came to life at the sight of the powerful gathering of energy. His cells began to flare, every pore of his skin opening and breathing in the daunting atmosphere. Death surrounded him: the death of his friends, the death of those he slew, and the death of his family. Both hands on the hilt of Leviathan, he centered himself and laid out his blade in front of him. A green light flashed from Leviathan, and an eerie green aura coalesced around Rokusho's body. "You are no different from these gremlins. No one on this planet is truly good, including the spiral knights. I won't fall to your hypocrisies." His voice calm and the language of the knights returned in full, he faced Arc with a silent ferocity only a master warrior contained within. "You are right about one thing. This ends now."

The two knights lunged toward each other. The two energies collided. With the swing of their blades all their battle aura exploded against one another. The floor cracked, everything around them bursting, unable to contain the released force and kinetic energy. Dust and smoke filled the air, and then silence came from within the collision. Darkness and silence. The debris began to clear, the shadows of the two fighters appearing...

Arc sat on one knee, armor shattered, and energy exhausted. A crack shot down his helmet, and the guise of the Salamander was broken. Body shaking violently the knight coughed blood and his head drooped. "Damn."

Rokusho stood above him, his armor wore down, the whole chest plate cracked throughout. Leviathan rested in his right hand, the blade destroyed about halfway, crumbled away from the blow. He raised the broken sword above Arc, ready to bring it down. But, he

didn't.

“Finish it you bastard. How could you, a renegade, a phantom, defeat me. I've lived my life as an honorable knight, only to be bested by a traitor.” Arc coughed the words out vehemently. “ A traitor to his kind, and to his family. No friend of mine.”

“There is no honor in death,” was all the words Rokusho had to offer him.

“What will you do now traitor!? They'll find you. They'll find you and I'll lead the hunting party. Take off that locket you wear, does it not burn on your chest? Fraternizing with the murderers. Come back you bastard! TYRAEL!” Arc roared and continued to scream from his unmoving position as Rokusho walked away.

Digging through the ruins he found where he had lain Greaz to rest. Picking up the body he found the nearest elevator and descended to the graveyard depth. Walking through the dark area, skeletal undead and ghosts of former knights bristled at his approach, but none attacked him, sensing his purpose. He stopped and dug a grave for his fallen comrade. Burying him, he stabbed Leviathan atop the fresh grave.

“Goodbye Greaz, you were truly family. And I forgive you. You will not be forgotten old friend.” Fingering the locket, he removed it from his neck and placed it on Leviathan. “And goodbye Janna. I won't open this, because I do not want to remember you through a simple picture. I love you, and I hope you understand my choices.” A tear fell down the lone knight's cheek. “Rokusho, looks like your father will be borrowing your name, may you rest in peace. You were all my family, equally. I won't be returning to haven, there's something I have to do first, but I'll be back.”

Wrapping Greaz's tattered, brown cloak around his body, Rokusho raised himself from the grave, a determined look in his now dead, gray eyes, just a glimmer of his old self behind them.

“I have to see about a king.”