

General,

I trust you've already read the preliminary findings and seen the pictures of the incident last week. The official final report has yet to be submitted, but I believe you will appreciate an early look at the attached photos of the damage this so-called Mantis allegedly caused at the enemy facility it claims to have escaped from, along with a journal it told us would be there. This Danelle mentioned several times is in fact a civilian cleric who had been assigned support for one Sergeant First Class Emily Schauthan, whose handwriting matches that in the journal up until the entry for "Day 46." The Sergeant was assumed KIA in a raid 72 days ago, which lines up with the timing. We're bringing Danelle in to meet Mantis. I'm sure her reaction will be enlightening, and of course you'll hear the results before the report is circulated.

I hope you'll think of me in the future if this information is of use to your crew in the Augmentation Unit.

Your dear friend and admirer, JL.

Day 3

I found this notebook under a loose stone in my cell, under the bed. A previous PoW must have smuggled it in, there's a bunch of writing in the front in a language I can't read. I'm going to start from the back and pray I'm not here long enough to run out of pages.

Day 5

They're treating me surprisingly well. 3 square a day and a comfortable bed. Haven't even interrogated me yet. Would be almost pleasant if I had my support. Fuck I miss Danelle. My chest burns 24/7 without her here to soothe me, it's getting hard to sleep.

Day 8

Yesterday I found the catch. Why they're so nice to me. In the morning they took me to a medical room and gave me a full workdown. Vitals, blood panels, EKG, MRI, the works. Then they brought me to a mech. Not mine, mine's gone. Was all dinged up, inoperable arm, half the cockpit frame torn off, gyros fucked. There was still blood in the cockpit from the corpse of whatever poor bastard they pulled out of it.

Strapped me in, but forced me to take my top off first. Said it was to cut down on interference. Interference of what?! I know they just want to leer at my tits. Perverts.

Made me run system diagnostics. Wanted me to interface and walk across the room. I told them I couldn't, with the gyros out of commission it wouldn't handle movement inputs properly. They bought it, but now they're kludging together some kind of repair. Fuck. I'm scared. Danelle I need you.

Day 13

I'm wondering if I can off myself before they get the repairs done. I've seen what happens to pilots who don't have their Nun. That won't be me.

Day 15

Still alive. Shit. I'm told repairs will be done tomorrow. Fuck.

Day 16

There was a delay. One more day. Or so they claim. I swear the repairs are done and the fuckers are stringing me along so I'm more stressed when they strap me in.

Day 18

They fixed the gyros. Patched up the cockpit too, and removed the left arm from just above the elbow joint. I'm feeling calm now, but it was a mess. I didn't want to. Told them I wouldn't do it, that they'd have to shoot me. But when I tasted the iron on my tongue I couldn't do it. I wasn't strong enough, I wanted to live. I want to live, even though I know what's going to happen. What's wrong with me? Why would I want to live like a monster? I booted it up. Interfaced. Synced the core. It felt weird. Wrong. It wasn't mine. Legs were wrong, almost fell a bunch of times. Felt so hot the whole time, like I was burning up from the inside. Still feel hot. I'm sweating so much. I cried and thrashed and raged afterward. Told them I'd kill them all, wanted to rip their heads off or punch through their chests. Curled up on my cot and sobbed. Don't know how many times I begged for Danelle in my head. She could still fix me, I know it.

Day 19

They strapped me in again. I thought I'd have more time to recover. My head hurts so much, something is growing on my skull. It's gotta be horns, but they're still just bumps under the skin. My veins feel like they're on fire.

Day 20

HATE HATE HATE! HATE THESE FUCKERS!! I'LL MASSACRE THEM ALL!! GONNA RIP OFF THEIR HEADS AND LET THEIR HOT, STEAMING BLOOD SPLATTER EVERYWHERE!!! DANELLE YOU STUPID WHORE WHERE ARE YOU WHEN I NEED YOU??

Day 22

I freaked out pretty bad a couple days ago. I think it freaked them out too, they gave me a day to rest. I'm still not sure why they're doing this, what they hope to get out of it. All I know is I hate it so much. My horns have broken through the skin and they hurt less now, it feels weird.

Day 23

Freaking out for a different reason today. Got out of the mech and thought I didn't have an arm. The arm that's missing on the mech. I remember the instructor in Integration Training mentioning one of the less immediately apparent side effects of going too long without rebalancing is some pilots will get confused about where their body ends and the mech begins. Sort of like phantom limb syndrome, or those glasses that reverse your vision. Actually I don't think that's right. Whatever.

I miss Danelle so badly. She'd be able to help me. I try to remember the exercises she'd walk me through. The mantras, the prayers and meditations. The words are there, but without her presence they feel...ineffective. I keep seeing her face. It burns even worse when I think about her. In my heart, but also between my legs. I don't want to think about her. I can't not think about her. Fuck it, I'm going to jill myself and worry about everything else tomorrow.

Day 24

I keep trying to fight...*[the writing fades out]*

Day 33

Damn pen ran out of ink. Took me more than a week to steal another one from a researcher. So much has happened. My horns are very pronounced now, been tempted to see if I can gore one of the fuckers with them. They're heavy, but my neck seems to be stronger too. Actually my whole body is stronger and I'm larger. Thought I was imagining the tighter squeeze in the mech until I had a checkup and the doc confirmed I'm between 5 and 6cm taller than when I was captured.

And that's not even the half of it. I have these, I guess they're like bony plates growing out of my shoulders and upper arms and thighs. And the rest of me has these, I don't remember the word. They're like the hard little bumps on crocodile skin. My teeth are sharper too.

I've gotten way more used to the mech, it feels like mine now. I sort of get the sense it's trying to call out to me but it's just outside of my hearing. Or something. My skin tingles when I get in it, and it feels like it's trying to embrace me. And it doesn't want to let me out, I feel myself sort of 'sticking' when I dismount. Chalked it up to being extra sweaty at first, but it's not that.

I should be super worried about all this. I think it would concern me more if I wasn't always seething with rage at my captors. It's worse in the mech too. Some days it takes all my willpower to not lunge at the nearest one and rip out their throat, but I know that would be the end of me. I need to find a way to escape so I can fight against them for real.

Oh ya, and I'm horny all the time. Especially when I think about Danelle, which happens a lot. And I have a dick now. And it works. Don't want to talk about that.

Day 34

Figured out the bastard's endgame. They want me to work for them. They knew the core would corrupt me and I'd become, in their words, "primal." They're trying to appeal to my instincts, offered me a fucking harem if I'd fight for them. Even paraded the men and women I could choose from in front of me. FUCK THAT!! Ya, I'm hopelessly aroused whenever I'm not hard focusing on something else, but I still have my dignity! No way I'd side with these monsters just to get my dick wet!! Fuck them FUCK THEM

Day 36

I think my anger is the only thing keeping me from giving in and agreeing to join up in exchange for sating my desires. I see the way they staff looks at me too. Half of them are disgusted by me and the other half wants me but are afraid I'll bite their heads off after like some kind of mantis. When I make it back maybe I should request a new call sign. The anger, the rage, it's there all the time, but usually quiet. Simmering in the background. It's...patient. Despite being the one in a cage, I'm beginning to feel like a predator stalking clueless prey. These fools don't even realize.

Day 37

Oh shit oh fuck oh shit. The mech BLED today. Like, actual blood. I was in the middle of an exercise and knocked the missing arm against a barrier. For some reason it made

my arm hurt and then the mech started FUCKING BLEEDING like it was injured! What the fuck is that?? When I dismounted I almost couldn't pull free, I left some skin behind in the cockpit. Oh gods what the fuck. I can't get back in. I've been too casual about this, it's FUCKING CORRUPTING ME and I've just been letting it because it hasn't felt that weird. But that's gotta be part of the corruption, right? Make me feel normal so I don't resist it. Fuck. FUCK. I've been so focused on the bastards keeping me caged I barely thought of the mech WITH A PIECE OF HELL POWERING IT that I've been climbing into almost every day for a fucking month with no support. Oh Gods. What would Danelle say? Weak. A monster. Pathetic. I want to curl up into a ball in the corner and die. It would be better than turning into this. But I can't. I can't. I want to live. I'm worthless. Fuck fuck fuck. Danelle please.

Day 38

Spent most of the day crying while hooked up to diagnostics in Medical. Can't decide if the whole bleeding mech thing scared them shitless or has them excited. First day in a while I haven't felt angry. I'm just sad.

Day 42

Been back in the mech. I really don't know *what* they want anymore. The anger is back, and I swear the Core is feeding it. Every time I strap in it's like there's a voice in my head that's a different version of me telling me to dismember them or some shit. I can't get out without leaving patches of skin behind, but the wounds close pretty fast and I think I've succeeded in hiding it. The mech arm is....growing. There's a pair of rods that look suspiciously like bones jutting out from the cutoff. And my captors seem to have decided to just...ignore it? The longer I'm here the more they confuse me.

Day 43

Writing early in the morning today. Just woke up from a dream. I was...a monster. A demon. I rampaged through the halls and slaughtered them all. They're blood coated my body. I bathed in it. I jolted awake in a cold sweat and spent the next hour running through the mantras, barely able to focus. I thought they weren't working, but maybe they are? The urges are there, the anger, the desire, but I haven't given in. I won't give in. I won't disappoint Danelle. I will see her again.

Day 43

PM I could feel the Core more than usual today, like it was right behind the seat and trying to burrow into my back. So hot it was painful, I was sweating. They had to pull me

out afterward and I screamed. The pain was intense, the skin on my entire back suck to the seat and tore off, like it was melted on. I was rare and bloody, and now it's two hours later and I'm healed, as far as I can tell. But my back is different. I can't see it, but I can feel it. It feels tough, and like there's rigid plates sliding past each other rather than flexible skin. Feels like I could get stabbed and turn the blade. That predatory feeling is back too, stronger than ever. I wonder if they know the extent of the monster they're creating. Do they care? Fuck I can't wait to rampage my way out of here. It's coming, I can feel it. I just need to wait a little longer, be a little stronger. Danelle I'm coming.

Day 46 *[the following entry is written in very large and crude letters, the paper torn in places from the pen being pressed into the page far too hard]*

The day after I ripped my back off they took me to the mech and the cockpit looked different. Creepy as fuck. The entire seat looked like a lump of flesh covered by stretched-thin skin. I wanted to turn away and vomit. But they forced me to climb in. I probably could have fought them but my mind reeling too much for me to really consider it. The seat was shaped perfectly for my new back, like it had been custom molded. As soon as the canopy closed it started to *pulse* around me, the familiar whirring replaced by a quiet beating, but still mechanical in nature.

They couldn't pull me out. They tried, but it's like I was fused or melted in. And honestly, I didn't want to come out.

Idiots picked then of all times to "satisfy my flesh" if I'd only agree to work with them. The only flesh I want in that way is Danelle's. Poor imbeciles seemed confused when I turned them down. I'm sort of getting the feeling they were told by someone above them that I'd act a certain way and don't know how to handle things not going to plan. Good. Fuck 'em.

The mech is too big for the hallways, so they emptied out a smaller ammunition storage locker and are holding me there. Lots of guards, lots of guns. I grin at them through the canopy and I can smell their nervousness. I could really find my mind slipping,

Shit's so weird. I can feel the core pulsing right behind me. I think it's somehow migrated through the containment matrix, I can feel it pressing into my back, beating in time with my heartbeat.

After a couple days I asked them to get the journal from my original cell, told them where it was and I wouldn't be happy if they read it. And I don't think they did. These mech arms are not meant for work as dexterous as writing though, part of the reason I've made this entry so long is for the practice. That and. I feel more like a person and less like a monster when I'm writing my thoughts down.

Day 48

Either the mech is shrinking around me or I'm growing inside it. It's hard to tell, hard to keep up with all the changes, but it's feeling tight as hell in here. And the dreams. Fuck the dreams. I'm going through the mantras dozens of times a day now, desperately trying to stay as centered as I can. The dreams are so raw and vivid. SO much bloodshed. If I wait a bit longer I can do it for real. I can free myself. I don't know how I know this, but I do. It's not speculation, I *know* it. I think the core is merging with my body. The pulsing feels like it's partly inside me now. But I can't exactly look and see.

Day 49

Holy FUCK. The cut off mech arm is....growing. Or regrowing? It's all bone and sinew And muscle and metal and wires. I'm scared, but also it looks rad as fuck. I don't see any of the info from the HUD or other readouts anymore, the displays have all gone dark, but somehow I still know all the information. It's just there, in my head. All the sensor data and readouts and diagnostics. I don't think even Danelle could help me now. Would I even still be considered human?

Day 51

I'm a fucked up butterfly of flesh and metal. My legs are gone. The mech legs are my legs. I don't even know when it happened, didn't notice it until it had happened. My arms are growing through the sidewalls of the mech, that I *did* notice. I'm going to have four arms, because the mech arms are also my arms. The lower pair are more human-like, I think I'll be able to have a lot more dexterity with them. Still too short to use though. Like a T-Rex. I hope they grow out soon, I want to write properly again. And I want to use them to strangle the fuck out of these assholes keep....oh god what am I thinking?

Day 54 *[the writing more closely resembled the refined script of earlier entries]*

My arms are done growing. I have tits too. I mean, the mech has tits? I mean, my tits have grown through the mech? I don't fucking know. I'm getting impatient. I want to bust out of here. I keep flexing my arms, eyeing up the walls. I bet I could break through easily. But I have to wait. It's okay, I can wait. I remember what I said a while back, that I should change my callsign to Mantis. It feels even more appropriate now. I wonder if I can grow wings?

Day 56

Holy shit, I'm growing wings! They're metal framed with what seems like an organic membrane? Like the rest of me it's a mix of organic and mechanical. The core is definitely in my chest now. I think it's merging with or replacing my heart? Fuck I feel so

powerful. It feels good. Soon. So soon. I'll be with Danelle again. She'll know it's me, I have faith.

Day 66

I've been waiting. I'm done waiting. It's time. I'm ready. Let's fuck shit up.