View Askew by seeker. Rated R for violence. No copyright infringement intended. Originally written for and posted to the Harry/Draco fuq-fest http://www.livejournal.com/community/hd_fqf/. Also, "Internecionamus" is a bastardized version of 'ad internecionem' meaning 'to the point of extermination' – used in this instance as a blocking spell.

His seventeenth year was supposed to be the beginning of great things; that's what his father always told him.

Draco was beginning to wonder just how much of what his father told him was absolute bullshit.

Three days after he turned seventeen, Lucius had taken him to meet Voldemort for the first time. Perhaps 'meet' wasn't the best way to put it: Lucius had taken him to grovel before the grotesque caricature of a wizard that the loony old bastard Riddle had become. It had taken every ounce of Draco's hard-earned impassivity to keep from vomiting all over the hem of Voldemort's robe. It had taken a heavy dose of mind-numbing terror to keep his mental shields in place when Voldemort probed them. Thankfully, all the Dark Lord had gleaned from his heavy-handed grope through Draco's thoughts was an overwhelming sense of an emotion that could be mistaken for awed dread.

As opposed to terrified dread.

It was a good thing Voldemort was an egomaniac of grandest proportions or Draco wouldn't have survived the encounter.

Now, however, a week later, Draco was back at Hogwarts. Ensconced (hidden) in his bed (cowering behind the curtains) musing on his father's parting words (mindlessly dwelling on the sentence of doom Lucius held over his head).

"The winter holidays will be especially joyous this year, my son. The culmination of years of preparation, and the beginning of your true adulthood. I know how much you look forward to it."

Translated, directly, from Malfoy-speak to plain English, that meant, "I can't wait for Yule, son, when all the Dark Arts I've drilled into your head will stand you in good stead as you get the Death Mark burned into your soul and sell yourself into perpetual slavery to a raving nutcase. Just like your doting father. Join me as I've promised you to him, or oppose me and die. Painfully."

If he could find a way to do it Draco didn't think he'd ever leave his bed again.

Not that sleeping was much help; it used to be sweet oblivion but with his mental shields in tatters, he was having nightmares for the first time since he was a child. Having seen his worst nightmare made flesh (if the skeletal fiend could be called flesh), Draco found his thoughts dwelling on awful, vague, unsettling images every time he closed his eyes. Occlumency wasn't helping: for the first time EVER he found himself completely incapable of fighting off the stream of thoughts that attacked him from within and without.

He knew they weren't simply his own fears coming to the fore in his mind… because he wasn't the star in most of them.

Harry Potter was.

And wasn't that ridiculous? Draco had spent years obsessing over Potter, and was self-aware enough to know it, beginning with the abortive attempt to forge a friendship in Madame Malkin's when they were eleven, bollixed up by his own lack of information and the Weasel's sneaky approach that undermined Draco's own straightforward offered hand. Who knew a ratty jumper and some chocolate frogs were the way to young Potter's heart? Who knew Potter didn't know what was good for him?

Of course, all too soon, Draco knew enough about Potter to realize his initial approaches had been all wrong, but by that time it was too late. All he could do was watch (constantly), plot (unsuccessfully),

compete (again, unsuccessfully) and shadow Potter every waking minute he possibly could. While it had been interesting, and he now knew everything from what kind of jam Potter preferred on his toast to exactly how long it took for Potter to shower after Quidditch practice, it had all been surface detail.

Lately, since the nightmares began, Draco was finding out all sorts of things about Potter. Things he didn't particularly want to know.

Oh, it wasn't as if he hadn't dreamt of Potter before. He'd been dreaming of Potter since before he'd known what it meant; once the nightly emissions began, Draco had an uncomfortably clear idea of exactly how deep his obsession with Potter had gone (not that he ever let that slip to Potter. Or anyone else. Ever. That's what silencing spells – and if necessary, Obliviate – were for).

But the nightmares he'd had since Voldemort had gone slicing through his mind were different. Draco wanted to know what Potter sounded like crying out in pleasure, not in pain; writhing under his touch, not his curse; screaming in completion, not agony.

Somehow, in breaking through Draco's mental shields, Voldemort had forged a connection. With the Dark Lord, or Potter, or somehow with both. A connection Draco was desperate to break.

A connection that bloomed, in an overload on all five senses, every time Draco closed his eyes.

The evening's little adventure in nail-biting horror was a recurring vision: Potter, a graveyard, a dead Hufflepuff (Cedric something-or-other, Draco hadn't paid much attention), a ring of chanting Death Eaters including a few whose outlines looked disturbingly like his aunt and his father, a VERY large snake, a rat-like little man, and a knife.

It might not have been so bad, if Draco'd simply been an observer. But no. However the Dark Maniac had managed it, Draco experienced the nightmares from Potter's perspective. After the first few, Draco knew precisely why Potter was a Gryffindork. Any sensible Slytherin would have pissed his robe and fainted in terror before the worst of it began, while hoping to survive long enough to escape later when their backs were turned. Potter simply gritted his teeth and… endured. It was painful. For everyone.

The air was cold, biting into Draco's skin. The spell binding him to the disgusting crumbly gravestone made his hands numb, much like Voldemort's cackle did to his thought processes. The heartbreak as he stared blearily down at Cedric Whatsisname's body was all Potter's, but that made no difference; Draco felt it all the same. The knife hurt like a bastard biting into him, and while Draco didn't understand the reasoning behind the massive sense of betrayal he (Potter) (they) (whatever) felt when he (Potter) (they) (god, this was confusing) looked at the rat-like man, the inner voice screaming 'Traitor! I will kill you! You will burn in hell!' came through quite clearly.

Draco'd never really understood just how passionate Potter could be in his hatred, rage and terror. Kind

of made the wet dreams he'd had pale a little in comparison.

Or perhaps it would make them hotter, now that Draco knew what sort of depths there were behind the stupid glasses and ill-fitting robes. If he could only stop having nightmares long enough to have another wet dream.

Ah, here came the part he hated. His wand, his dirty, bloody, scraped hand, his trembling voice, and ghosts. God, Draco hated ghosts. But there they were, a pair that had to be Potter's parents, Cedric Whoever begging Potter to take his body home (yeesh! Hufflepuffs! So concerned with themselves, when what Potter should have been concentrating on was escaping and getting the hell back to Hogwarts)… a veritable parade of the deceased. Then the tug in his belly, and back to safety, though the nightmare didn't end there. No, then there was the guilt, and the dread, and the 'my parents' murderer is alive due to me' endless bewailment, leading to such a miasma of pain and depression Draco just wanted to stick his wand in his own chest and Avada- himself.

Then he woke up.

How the fuck did Potter LIVE with this?

And that wasn't even the worst.

Oh, no. Then there was the Department of Mysteries nightmare, when some mangy-looking wild-eyed brute taunted Aunt Bella, who taunted right back, until the idiot man fell into some sort of void, and Potter's heart exploded in his chest. Or at least that's what it felt like. Failure and anguish and yet MORE guilt, leaving Draco feeling like the loneliest person on the entire planet, wanting to stick his wand in his chest and Avada- himself. Again.

Barely managing to hold a hex behind his teeth when Goyle asked him (for the eighth time) about breakfast, Draco dragged himself from bed, forced himself through his morning ablutions, and stomped upstairs to the main hall. The sunlight was appallingly bright, the enchanted ceiling sparkled in a manner that could only be described as disgustingly pretty, and the post owls hooted with truly nauseating cheer as they delivered the morning mail. He ignored the newspaper getting soggy in his porridge, squinted against the post-nightmare headache that had become the norm, and glanced askance at Potter.

The Golden Boy looked a bit peaked, with shadows under his eyes, his hair tousled to the point of appearing that he'd combed it with a miniature whirlwind, and from the way he picked at his bacon, his appetite was off. Much like Draco's. The Weasel kept giving Potter sideways looks, concern painted along with the freckles all across his homely face. The Mudblood had her bushy head in a book, as usual, but even she reached over now and again to pat Potter's arm. Potter gave her a bleak smile in response that lasted almost long enough to be noticed, then rested his forehead against his palm and gazed blankly at the tabletop.

Even from across the room, Draco could see that the scar on his forehead was a livid scarlet.

Crunching absently on a piece of toast, he thought about it. Potter looked the way he, Draco, felt. Considering why Draco felt like the southern end of a north-bound blast-ended skrewt, it didn't take a genius to figure out why. It wasn't as if looks were the only parallel between them.

Draco groaned into his juice. If Voldemort was giving Draco migraines with the bloody nightmares, it must be all the worse for Potter, who actually FELT all that angst and agony and anguish (not to mention guilt piled on top of GUILT). Yet still, he got up every morning and slogged his way forward toward his fate, instead of concentrating on survival and getting as far away from the Dark Loony as he possibly could..

Draco'd always known Gryffindors had more balls than brains, and Potter proved it.

Unfortunately, as days passed, as mornings followed nights full of dreadful memories and visions of horrific futures, Draco found himself more and more appalled with his own ordained future, and more and more sympathetic toward Potter's fatalistic stance.

That night, like the last too many to count, Draco lay down and glared at the heavy green velvet closing him away from his housemates. The regular nightmares were bad enough, but the full-color visions of soul-destroying guilt and personal angst were interspersed with the weirdest little vignettes, where the world was very big and he (Potter) (they) was (were) very, very small, and stuffed into a cramped, moldy, dusty space too tiny to fit a house elf while spiders crawled over his skin and into his mouth and over his eyelashes and a hippogriff shook the stairs (stairs?) above his head. The lock on the door rattled as he cowered, knowing that what waited outside the cave-like space was even worse than being stuck in the darkness.

Those nightmares were shorter, and much less bloody, but for some reason left Draco hyperventilating, staring wide-eyed at his bed curtains with his wand held out ready to hex the next person who so much as BREATHED at him.

And once in awhile, for a special treat, Draco found himself in a world of nothing but frost and blackness, freezing to death, completely drained, as flashes of bright green light seared his eyes, and a woman screamed, endlessly, into the void around him.

Mornings after those nightmares, Draco kept a special basin by the side of his bed, so he didn't even have to make it to the toilet to throw up.

He'd never wanted Potter's life. Only Potter.

Now he knew why.

Life continued, as it does, days of schoolwork and Potter-watching and (barely) not killing his dorm mates followed by nights of screaming himself hoarse and shaking like a leaf until sunrise when he could escape his bed and begin the cycle over again. Days passed all too swiftly and much too quickly it was the week after the Halloween feast, less than a month until the Yule holidays.

Less than a month before Draco told his father that Death Eating and kowtowing before caricatures of ultimate evil were not in his future. Less than a month before his life became as hellish in the day as it was every night.

The more he thought about it, the simpler throwing himself off the Astronomy Tower sounded.

Then, on a Tuesday night of no particular importance, the standard nightmare took a decidedly non-standard turn.

For once, Draco didn't find himself in a dark enclosed space, or an open graveyard, or a Ministry office, or even as guest of honor at a Death Eater fete. This time, it was simply a drafty, very cold, musty-smelling stone room that looked depressingly familiar.

It was in the old wing of Malfoy Manor, in the sub-dungeon level. Sconces on the wall barely bit into the darkness; the stone floor beneath his feet made his bones ache. Somewhere, something dripped. It smelled like blood.

Draco's skin crawled, and that was BEFORE he looked up to see Voldemort smirking down at him. At least, he thought it was a smirk. It was difficult to tell expressions on a mouth that had no lips.

Fighting the nausea that surged through him, Draco clenched his jaw and kept his eyes open, despite a real urge to close them and fling his arms over his face for good measure. Just then a voice he'd dreaded spoke up behind him.

“It is all arranged, my Lord,” Draco’s father intoned, sounding much too self-satisfied for it, whatever it was, to be a good thing.

“Excellent, Lucius,” Voldemort hissed. His eyes gleamed (red, of course) and Draco was caught between rolling his own eyes and running for cover. A happy Voldemort was not a pleasant sight in any sense. “Soon, your son will fulfill his place in destiny, and bring Potter to me.”

What?

No. Draco didn’t think so.

Then Lucius started speaking again, and Draco listened carefully. This wasn’t just about Potter. This was about Draco being used as bait in a trap to eviscerate Potter, and it was NOT going to happen.

Subjectively several hours later, in reality about forty five minutes, Draco sat bolt upright in bed. His skin

was soaked with sweat, his stomach roiled, and his fists clenched until his nails cut crescent wounds into his palms.

If there'd been any doubt before, none remained. Draco was not joining his father, was not becoming Voldemort's follower, and was certainly not going to crack the lower wards of Hogwarts for the Death Eaters to come waltzing in and sacrifice Harry in an arcane (and extremely agonizing) dark arts ceremony to turn Voldemort the Violently Insane into an immortal.

Determined to seek refuge and foil the dastardly plot at the same time, Draco spent the rest of the night trying to figure out how to save Potter, save the school, and save his own skin.

Not necessarily in that order.

As the daily bustle began around him, Draco dressed and headed down for yet another breakfast he couldn't eat. His thoughts ticked over busily as he sat and stared unblinkingly at Potter, whose scar once again blazed, this time a nasty-looking crimson.

If Draco couldn't beat them, and he knew for a fact he couldn't beat either Potter OR Voldemort, then he'd join them. Potter, not Voldemort. The thought of joining Voldemort made Draco want to hand

himself over to the Giant Squid as an appetizer, complete with parsley clenched in his teeth. The thought of joining Potter…

Made him hot.

So. What to do. What to do?

The morning post owl dropped a letter from his father on his head, and Draco had an epiphany.

Skiving off Runes wasn't difficult; his uncustomary pallor (extreme even for a Malfoy), red-rimmed eyes and vaguely dazed expression made it both easy and believable to plead the headache, only instead of heading to the infirmary Draco went off to the Owlery. Once there, he found the most nondescript brown owl he could pick, tied the warning note to its leg, and sent it off, crossing his fingers that the charm-encryptions he'd added to disguise his handwriting would hold up to Dumbledore's inspection.

Then he coaxed a very suspicious Hedwig over, and sweetly asked her to carry an identical note to Potter. He felt a little silly trying to sweet-talk an owl, but she was also Potter's familiar, so Draco gave it his best effort.

“You see, Hedwig,” he whispered, “I really rather like Harry,” not that he’d ever admit it to anyone but an owl, and even then not in a tone above a bare whisper in the middle of a completely-deserted owlery. “I most certainly don’t want to see him sacrificed to further the reign of a barking mad megalomaniac with delusions of grandeur, do you?”

Hedwig gave him a wild roll of a bright yellow eye, as much as if to say, ‘Of course not, you blithering idiot. Get on with it.’

Draco shook off the scolding words in his head and squinted sideways at Hedwig, wondering if Voldemort messing with his mind had set more off kilter than just his dreams. Hedwig hooted impatiently and snapped the letter from his hand, barely missing his fingers, then glided out the window in search of her master.

“Right,” Draco muttered, inspecting his fingertips for beak-scratches, “that takes care of that.”

Except, of course, it didn’t.

He'd sent the second note to Potter because Dumbledore had proven many times that he had no problem whatsoever tossing Harry headfirst into danger's path if it suited his plans. Draco, being a right-minded Slytherin, made the mistake of thinking if he told Potter as well, Potter would see through the daft old bastard's manipulations and take care of himself.

Harry, of course, was a Gryffindor.

So much for self-preservation.

Unfortunately for Draco, Voldemort had a back-up plan, and Draco wasn't the only one ordered to cripple the wards.

Equally unfortunate for Draco's watchful eye, the back-up plan was a Ravenclaw, and damned if she didn't do exactly what Draco wouldn't.

Damned if bloody Dumbledore and double-damned Potter didn't step right into the muck.

And damned if suddenly idiot-minded Draco didn't forget everything he'd ever learned about saving his own neck, and throw himself face-first into the fray to save his stupid Potter.

Obsessions.

Fucked up one's whole perspective.

The events of the evening were a blur (thankfully). The professors and a group of sacrificial lambs… er, students… met the Death Eaters at the Great Hall, and battle was joined.

Draco hid behind one of the larger suits of armor in the shadows along the side of the room.

Until, of course, everything Voldemort had told Lucius came to pass, and Brainlessly Brave Potter broke from the pack to face Voldemort head-on. Voldemort cackled, a sound that would have been clichéd except it literally chilled Draco's blood, and Harry screamed defiance. Dumbledore, flanked by McGonagall and (weirdly enough) Snape, held off the press of Death Eaters and let a seventeen year old boy with more testosterone than good sense take on the most horrendous dark wizard in an age (or more, since Grindlewald at least APPEARED human. And never stooped to drinking unicorns' blood).

None of them saw what Draco did. Sneaking up along the tables, on the far side away from the worst of the fighting… his aunt Bellatrix. Wand out, eyes fixed on Potter, mouth moving in a curse Draco had only read about (and even that had made him feel sick for hours). Not wanting to see Potter turned inside out whilst still breathing, Draco looked around frantically for someone, ANYONE, to come to Potter's aid.

Nobody noticed.

Draco tried screaming for help.

Nobody heard.

“Well, fuck it!” he sighed, then threw himself bodily between Potter and Aunt Bella, wondering all the while what the hell he thought he was doing and who’d replaced the real Draco Malfoy with this ridiculously gallant knight in Slytherin armor (well, robes, but it was the thought that counted, and there was a great deal of real silver thread embroidered about them). Pointing his wand at Bellatrix even as he shielded Potter with his body, Draco screamed, “Internecionamus!”

He hadn’t really expected it to work. Hadn’t thought much at all, really, only went with instincts that for the first time in his life weren’t yelling at him to save his own neck, but rather to save Harry’s. Draco stood, panting for breath at the surge of magic pulled from him to stop and rebound the curse, and watched as his aunt’s skin rippled. Muscle and flesh shifted, veins pulled, her hand fell open and her wand dropped uselessly from it as she began to scream.

And scream

And scream.

Draco heard nothing but her screaming, until Dumbledore’s voice rumbled, “Finite! Cede!”

Bellatrix finally stopped screaming when her flesh melted away from her bones and her corpse fell to a

heap four feet away from where Draco stood, frozen.

Then he threw up.

When he finally stopped retching, and the tears stopped leaking from his eyes, he felt a solid warmth beside him. Wiping his mouth on his robe, fine silver threads be damned, he looked sideways to see Harry Potter, wand smoking slightly, looking as green as Draco felt, leaning against his shoulder, staring blankly up at the main table. Draco followed the exhausted gaze to see Voldemort… what remained of Voldemort… gently crumbling to ash all over Flitwick's place setting.

"Guess he won't be wanting to use that plate for dinner," Potter mumbled.

Draco looked at him incredulously. Potter turned his head, met his eyes, and gave him the most singularly amazing smile Draco had ever seen. On anyone.

"Thanks, by the way," Potter continued.

“F’r what?” Draco slurred. His tendons felt like they’d come unstrung. He wanted to sit there until Doomsday.

He looked around at the dead and wounded, and shuddered. Strike that thought. Doomsday had been and gone, and he’d survived.

Beside him, Potter gave a sound that in better circumstances might have been a chuckle. “For the warning, and for saving my life.” Potter nodded at the glutinous reddish mass that had been Draco’s aunt. “Wouldn’t’ve wanted to go through that.”

Draco was too busy throwing up again to tell Potter he was welcome. Even though, actually, he was.

The next two days were a kaleidoscope of cancelled classes, debriefings with everyone from Aurors to ministry officials to, again of all people, Snape, check-ups from Pomfrey, hiding from angry Slytherins who’d lost relatives in the fight and from angry Gryffindors who didn’t believe it was a Ravenclaw who’d betrayed the school. For Draco, most of it passed in a whirl of color and sound that made very little impression on his exhausted mind. But a few choice moments did stand out.

Dumbledore, eyes more piercing and less dotty than Draco had ever seen, thanking him in front of the entire assembled survivors of the school population, for saving Harry Potter so Harry Potter could save them all (by slaughtering Voldemort with a very effective and really horrific burning spell based on something Fawkes had told him, which he never shared with another living soul, no matter how much Draco nagged in later years).

Crabbe, punching Goyle for trying to kill Draco, then patting Draco's shoulder hard enough to make his knees buckle as he thanked Draco for keeping them from having to get the Mark, "'cause I really didn't wanna. Really."

Relief making Draco nearly light-headed as he realized his father had escaped capture, evaded arrest, and gotten rid of all the evidence, so he wouldn't be sent to Azkaban. Followed immediately by a hollow feeling in his gut at the formally-worded letter from Lucius, thrust in his face by an exceptionally-grumpy eagle owl, telling Draco never to darken the door of Malfoy Manor again.

Draco would have laughed at the wording if the meaning hadn't been so plain.

Some semblance of routine was re-established. Classes continued. Alliances were renegotiated and lines were re-drawn, or allowed to vanish as the need to maintain them was gone. Draco finally stopped sleeping with one eye open, as he had since the nightmares ended and the death threats began. He grew closer to Crabbe, broke off ties with Goyle and Parkinson, reached a truce with Blaise and Bulstrode.

And the Weasel. And the Know-it-all. And the rest of the Gryffindorks, who'd rather bizarrely decided he was Good after he'd had his fit of madness in front of everyone and covered Potter's back. He spent most of the time trying to avoid them, and ignored them when he couldn't escape them.

He also made a truce with most of Ravenclaw, once they got over the shock of being the newly-crowned House of Evil at Hogwarts. Many of them really appreciated the pointers he could give them on How to Live with All the Other Houses Hating Your Guts and Still Excel at Quidditch. Except Against Potter.

He didn't bother with the Hufflepuffs. They'd've been happy to befriend him if he asked, he just didn't care.

Days passed. Yule came. There was a lightness in the atmosphere, a glitter to the fairy lights and a beauty to the evergreen boughs that seemed to glisten, with the threat of Voldemort finally removed. Not that there were many to appreciate the change. The halls of Hogwarts were emptier than they'd been in years. Too many families had come too close to losing their children, so nearly all the students

went home to celebrate the holidays with their loved ones.

The third night of solitude found him sitting in the Great Hall, nursing a mug of chocolate, staring morosely into the fire. He wasn't thinking of anything in particular, he told himself, yet wasn't the least surprised when Potter settled onto the bench next to him.

After all, he'd been obsessing over Potter for years, and it had never conjured him up before. So it couldn't have been the fact that the only thing he could think about was Harry that suddenly brought Harry, out of the blue, to sit so close to him Draco could feel his body heat more intensely than the fire.

"Hullo," Potter said.

"Hm," Draco muttered in response.

"Good chocolate?" Potter asked, sounding only mildly interested at best.

“Get your own,” Draco told him, not really meaning it.

“Not thirsty.” Potter shifted, brushing against Draco’s side, and Draco’s mouth went dry.

Since the nightmares had stopped, the earlier, more interesting dreams had started back up. Now that Draco actually knew what Potter looked like writhing and screaming, they were… even more interesting than they had been. A few visuals popped into his mind and he found himself flushing, though not from the heat of the fire. He carefully set the mug on the table, and took a deep breath.

“Want to play some-“

He didn’t bother to hear what suggestion Potter had come up with to waste time, because Draco was through wasting time. Hoping the move wouldn’t be followed by Potter immediately hexing his ass off, Draco turned to Potter, cupped his face between his hands, leaned in, and kissed him.

Thoroughly.

Oddly gently, but quite thoroughly.

When he finally broke for breath, Potter's wand was still in his pocket. Potter's usually bright green eyes were hazy to the point of delirium, his lips were swollen, his hands were clutching the front of Draco's robes, and he was making no move to escape at all.

Draco smirked.

Potter broke through the haze long enough to glare at him, then kissed him back.

The rest of the night was another blur, but of a much more appealing sort than the past several days. Draco surfaced a few times, but was pulled back under the covers by Harry, no longer Potter, not after the second explosive orgasm; Harry swam up from the heat between them long enough to spell the curtains closed and toss out a silencing charm, but that was all the separation Draco would allow. By the time the two were completely exhausted, wrung out and shaking, sweaty and sticky and wrapped around one another, there was no room for air between them.

In the early morning hours, Draco watched Harry sleep. When he woke up again, they'd dive back in, but until then Draco enjoyed the quiet. Absently brushing a lock of dark hair away from Harry's fading scar, Draco smiled at his thoughts. In the end, he'd chosen his own path, even if it was clamped to Harry Potter's side. What it all came down to was that he'd ended up living the dream.

The nightmares had been worth it.

END