

I don't know why exactly I chose this, but it is amazing. The speed, the height, the fact that I'm not being tortured right now. I've never been in a Ripwing before and never expected to be in one either. This was just the way to put an end to this adventure.

Oh yeah, my name is Artos and this is Eurora the home of corruption, thieves, murderers and regimes. Welcome to my home. I don't differ from the norm much, but some people just simply don't like my face and unfortunately I can't help that, that's why they were chasing me back there. Well ... that and a few more little insignificant things. I came out rather positively from this recent job and now I'm living a dream flying in a Ripwing across New-Paris. The pilot didn't seem to mind me jumping in uninvited, I'd even enjoy looking at her, quite a stunning sight, but unfortunately I'm too busy worrying about getting shredded by the pulseammoo that's flying all around us. I guess they weren't too happy with my miraculous escape, a few barrel rolls here and there and we manage to get far away and my stomach still has the eggs I had for breakfast, that's a win in my book.

The view from this height would be amazing if this gorydamn planet wouldn't always have dark clouds laying over the city. The painter of this world must've had too much brown and black at his disposal. Some friend of mine who's rather knowledgeable in recent history said it resembles London a lot, for all I care it could be New York as well, I was always more intrigued by the distant past. This is my city and it's gorydamn atrocious let me tell you.

I can feel my knuckles going white as I hold onto the frame more and more as we soar through the clouds. The world is actually rather pretty above these dirty clouds. Eurora is a dirty shithole of a planet by all means. We provide one third of the solar system's industry, regulations are danced around by megacorporations daily just for profit. Those executives never so much as set foot on this planet, they don't really care about the pollution until it's too late. Yet up here above the clouds it's rather clean and calm.

This peace of mind doesn't last long as she decides that we should plummet down back into the dirt once again. What I wouldn't have given to stay up there for just a few more moments. As we descend from the clouds the city takes off its clothes and shows herself to us with delicate details. The eastern bloc is where all the local bigwigs are, thus it is the only clean and protected part, as you get further from it the filth takes bigger and bigger chunks from the streets. If we could just put a raincoat over the dirty streets and alleys we could sell this place as a somewhat decent modern city. But then we'd miss out on all the fun, despite all its flaws people still come to live here.

Oh, I almost forgot about the „crown jewel”. The Eurora Command HQ, home of the criminals in suits. Let me paint you the building. It's made of dark marble, it's pointy, it cuts into the clouds, it's menacing, every time I look at it something starts crawling across my back. I'm certain there are a bunch of „mustache twirling villain” type of people in there. And of course we're heading straight towards it. Dread grips my throat as I realize I just jumped from a small bucket right into the bloody well.

Before I could say anything she just slips out and jumps down. What the fuck is wrong with people nowadays. She just left me here, I don't even know how to fly this thing. As I see her fall through the sky towards the building with the grace of a hummingbird something starts bothering my eye in my peripheral vision, I try to shove it aside and just enjoy the view, but it doesn't budge. Oh it's the holoscreen that is starting to fill up with red warning messages, great. I can see the problem clearly, it's the forefront of the building that we're blasting towards. New warnings keep popping up while I try to get hold of the situation

by rapidly pressing buttons. I fantasized about dying in thrilling situations, but not like this. Doesn't this thing have an autopilot feature or something?

„AUTOPILOT ENGAGED”

Thank the lords for voice recognition. My heart is panting in my throat as the screen slowly turns blue once again. I take a deep breath and almost vomit my heart out as the AI pulls the Ripwing straight up towards the sky. I can feel my bones melting into the frame of the Ripwing as the G forces push me down. We miss the calm marble by inches and as I contemplate breaking my own neck to end this nightmare we reach the clouds and our altitude stabilizes.

„SET TARGET COORDINATES” The AI voice screeches at me and shoves the map of the city into my face. I find a calm spot between two abandoned buildings I know well and tell the AI to land there. We plummet down through the clouds a lot more peacefully this time. I close my eyes for a moment and focus on not shitting myself as all the adrenaline that got released in my body makes me shake. Next thing I know we land gently in the empty field.

Ahh, fuck this thing. As I get out and kick the Ripwing's side. I would love to leave, yet something keeps me standing by the Ripwing and thinking. Then I remember, she had a small red box by her side that was not fitting the Ripwing's design at all and that she had left the box there. Must be worth something I think to myself as I get the box out of the Ripwing and leave. I walk a few alleys while trying to snap out from under the shock of the situation. As a good thief while walking I unconsciously try to pry open the box and after a few tries at picking the lock I hear it. *click* It is open. I snap the lid open with a huge grin on my face.

As it reveals what's inside the grin vanishes and plummets right into my stomach. I get cramps from the realisation. Despite all my hopes and dreams all that comes out is „Fuck, fuck, FUUUUCK!” I turn around pick up the pace and start running as fast as I can. The shadow of that pointy black building starts growing and overshadows my silhouette.

An alley and a few hundred metres is all that is left between me and the entrance of this morgue and of course my lungs that are trying to reach outside my body for more oxygen. The black walls of the alley usher me forward, perfect setting for a utopic thriller I think to myself.

I can't believe I'm doing this, am I insane or something? This is none of my business, I could just leave the box here and leave, yet I keep running towards the menacing monster's open mouth. She could die in there without it. But why is she important to me? I just met her and she didn't even say a word to me.

Yet she didn't refuse saving my arse either, I owe her one! That bloody honorable part in me ... must've watched too many movies. As I battle my own thoughts on the matter I realize the clock is ticking. I'll think about it later and without any chance at second thoughts rush towards the building.

Before I could reach the entrance I hear a window shatter above me. Small pieces of sharp glass come raining down to cause my premature death. I can manage to jump to the side, before I'm impaled. As I get up I see my jacket cut open and my left arm bleeding.

Fantastic, my favourite jacket. I swallow my self-loathing as I hear a thump I was not prepared to hear, that was definitely not a healthy thump. The outlines of her motionless body scare me in this dim light. I see nothing but pain as she lays there bruised, beaten, burnt, cut, bleeding and surrounded by some disgusting green matter. She just lays there like a fallen angel.

Chemical war conditioning kicks in before I could do anything and all that I realize is that I'm running with her in my arms.

Let me take a small detour to explain why I have chemical war conditioning or as we call it sneek. Eurora is a lovely planet, but somewhere in recent past our leadership didn't really agree with the rules of those that were outside our solar system and we just sort of told them to fuck off. They didn't like this and came here with big fuck you batons to beat down our insignificant rebellion. This turned into a small scale war as the CCL – Consecrated Central League even dropped down Legionnaires to quell our uprising. Everyone who was battle ready, above the age of 16 received chemical war conditioning in the following years to prepare them for combat, after the war this „gift” still lingers around in some of us. It was meant to be a temporary technological enhancement and was taken back from most of the populace. If you managed to play your cards right you could keep it and could even get some fancy upgrades on the black market if you were loaded. I'll keep the tale of how I retained mine for another time. All you have to know is with this I can „slow down” time and turn towards a more tactical approach.

Thankfully this part of town is especially empty at this hour, nobody wants to be out in the dim darkness in Eurora. The next alley is empty, I put her down carefully and scream inside from the situation. She's broken in so many pieces, blood soaks her clothes, as I sit there between misery and doubt I hear another thump, this thunders through the air as a hammer hits an anvil. I look out of the alley and see pure gold in front of my eyes. Coming straight towards me. Imperial armour lined with gold, a raw-cut face, golden braids, did I enter some fairy tale? Where is the white horse?

I look back towards her, she is unconsciously clutching to a small metal pipe. As I get her fingers off it I recognize it immediately. Not good, not good at all. I can hear the small clanks as he gets closer and closer with each step. She's gonna die if left in this condition, yet if we stay we're both dying in less than a minute. I ran through all the scenarios as I get impaled, killed, mauled, murdered and all I can see is both of us dying, but I die certainly.

Why do I have to die? I remember the box, smash it open by my side and pick out a small ring like piece from it. I know what it is, I saw it used once. The eye of Horus, as I started rolling the small ring into a cut of papyrus I could somewhat recognize the symbols on it. It is called Horus' resurrection, the hieroglyphs are a powerful incantation that activate military-grade nanobots. It can heal the most severe of wounds, restoring the body and mind in a day. Unfortunately it is a one time use thing, it's extremely rare.

Hey, I can know a few things too you know. You don't have to be a book worm to know things around the world. My egyptian is totally trash and reading hieroglyphs isn't my strong suite either. I break the words in half as I utter them. The papyrus partially lights up as another dude rushes from the alley with grave fear on his face and takes the papyrus from my hands. As I reach for my knife to get this worm out of my way I hear him utter the words, so without stabbing him I repeat what he says. The papyrus lights up all the way, her body lights up with the same light as well and we bask in the light of Horus for a few seconds as the papyrus vanishes and her body starts regenerating.

He kneels down by her. „Oh dear god, Cyana what have you done to yourself?” He looks over at me with anger in his eyes, uncertain whether he will attack me I just look at him plainly. Who is he? What is he doing here? And more importantly what does he expect of me? Before I could ask him anything I remind myself about the colossus that's coming towards us. I shove the red box into his hands without thinking and tell him to GTFO and

hide the box as fast as he can. He just stands there looking at me. I quickly smack him across the face and point him towards the small intersection in the alley.

I look back at her. Some of her wounds might have healed, but she isn't going to be conscious for a long while. I pick her up again, throw her across my shoulder and start sprinting. As I make my way across the alley I can hear the clatter of his armor faster and faster. Now that he sees me running he will have to catch me, which he most likely will. Given he wears Pulsearmor and I have a 60 kilo woman on my shoulders, this will be a short chase to a majestic finale.

The world is desperate for my demise as it seems. The streets are dreamy and quiet as I run along them. My breath is finite. I turn a left corner, almost knock over a trashcan, a steep right follows. I know some of these streets, maybe I can lose him. In reality though his shadow always looms over me, as if this was a comical film. The dim light of the streetlamps gets overblown by another source behind my back. He's close, too close. I know what gives off this blinding yellow light. The pulsearmor starts humming under my breath and the lance only misses my right shoulder by mere inches, perhaps a miracle. I can see him pick up the spear as I peek back and throw it again. The first was a warning, this will not miss. I dodge behind a lamppost. The clatter of steel behind me assures my mind that I was half a second away from death.

As the lamppost hits the ground I can hear the humming of the lance mid air as it soars through the veil of the night to reach my shell. Abandoned and without options I clutch the metal cylinder in my pocket. I pull out the metal pipe in my right, press against both of its ends and the light tears away the darkness. A solid blue lance hums in my right, in my sudden surprise I almost forget the pike of yellow death racing towards my heart. With a half-arsed move I parry the tip, almost breaking my arm in the move and continue running. I can hear a cackle from behind. The wolf has found its prey.

The clattering of his armor stops for a second, perhaps in surprise. Unfortunately I can feel a renewed bloodthirst in his steps. I have no time to move my body as his lance scratches a half centimeter wide part off of my right thigh. Almost stumbling from agony I manage to use my newfound weapon to balance my next step. I propell myself over a railing and try to put her down gently by a brick wall. The lance goes right through my left shoulder, just where moments ago she was. The momentum knocks me forward and I throw her unconscious body against the wall, while I get nailed on it right above her. I hope I didn't break any of her bones foolishly, while I cough up some blood in pain.

Things aren't going too well for me at the moment. I'm pinned to the wall, I can hear his footsteps getting closer, as much as I try to I can't move my body, even with all this adrenaline surging in my veins I can't do anything. A quick flash races through my mind. Are you tired of miraculous revival already? Well I've got one more trick in my left pocket, I try to move my left hand to reach into it, but all I can manage is twitch my fingers a little. My right lets go of the blue lance and I reach for my hail mary as the energy weapon falls to the ground.

I clutch the heels of Achilles. Photographic memory is a hell of a gift in times like these. I imagine the text written on the ring, it's in greek of course ... But wait, there's the text in eno-english too, thank god ... „Sing, Goddess, of the rage of Peleus' son Achilles, the accursed rage that brought great suffering to the Achaeans.” A faint image characterizes in my mind as this small citation brings me back to high school literature class, despite my class mates' hate towards the ancient literature like Iliad, I enjoyed it thoroughly, I guess I was

always an outlier. Golden stars dancing in my vision break the remembrance, I can feel my left once again and with that comes the pain. Like a bug in a collectors' book I'm pinned. I grasp after my own spear with my right, while roaring through the night from the pain as I slowly pull the golden one out of the wall, then push it through the gaping hole in my shoulder. As the spear falls to the ground a golden liquid fills the hole in seconds. I feel renewed. Modern drugs and nanotechnology are crazy.

I flip around just in time to dodge a quick jab and shatter my spear through his right collarbone, his roar like that of a lion echoes through my eardrums. Rage fills his eyes, I duck under a left handed hook, pull the spear out and dance away from the wall. Left foot, right foot, I step like a graceful dancer in front of the wealthiest crowd. As he flips towards me I push my spear through his calves, momentarily binding him to his spot, I can feel the magic running out already. These are but momentary powerups, you too can get the taste of Gods' power, if only for a few moments. As it read in the book. I dodge around him as he barks at me like a chained dog and hurls uncontrolled punches towards me. Over by the wall I grab his golden spear. Without a moment of hesitation I use the wall to propell myself back towards him and just as he pulls out my blue flame, I send the javellin right through his neck. He froze in the moment as it cut a clean hole through his neck. I can hear it shatter the wall behind as it leaves his body. With his last breath he reaches towards me and buckles to the ground.

I can see the golden liquid pouring out of my shoulder and blood slowly dripping down my clothes again. In great pain I pick up the girl and run away as fast as I can, leaving the dying giant behind to his own fate. The rattle of his armor haunts me as I flee as if he was still trying to get up, two big thumps later I didn't hear more of him, hopefully putting an end to this chapter.

Reality found its way back into my skull and I started to make sense of my whereabouts. The only safe place I knew I could take the girl to was Jerry's apartment on this side of the town. The golden stars pulsated heavily in the corner of my eye as I stumbled across the dark streets. One last step on these stairs, I took no chances and kicked the door down, I'll explain later I thought. A quick right turn, I threw the girl on the bed and collapsed on the carpet.

The room is shaking around me, or perhaps I'm the one spinning. Maybe I'm dreaming. Reality won however as I tried to get up and almost pissed myself from the flaring pain in my left shoulder. My vision was blurry from the pain, but I could definitely make out a big crimson puddle around my body, my tongue was coated in iron. I looked around and rolled to my back, while trying not to move the left side of my body. The carpet is completely ruined from the blood. Well, that's one more thing to put on my cheque.

Someone was smoking in the corner of the room. I couldn't quite make it out, but my nose caught the scent of lavender coming from that direction as well, must be a woman then. After a few painful tries I managed to sit up and finally get up on my feet. The room was still shaking like we were in a five year olds snowglobe. I got up against the wall and supported myself to the bathroom. Halfway I realized I left my trail of blood on the wall like a snail and tried to keep on my feet.

A corpse smiled back from the mirror. Outlines blurry. My hair was a mess of dried blood, dirt and sweat. Several fresh scars across my face from the pulsance. My outfit was

completely ruined. Nice designer jacket you've got there jackass. My inner voice is ever so annoying ...

The large hole on my left side was mostly patched up by someone. A little bit of blood was leaking thanks to me having to move around, but besides that it was covered up with surgical precision. This angel full of good will could've pushed a few milligrams of speed or mesh into me to ease my suffering.

Overall I have no idea how I've not gotten noticed by anyone last night with this condition and an unconscious girl on my shoulder. Probably noone wanted to object. I know I sure as hell wouldn't based on my looks.

I wandered out of the bathroom and fell down on the couch. The girl was still smoking in the corner, paying no mind to me. The table was empty, I searched my pockets but couldn't find the pulsance I wielded last night. I was sure I picked mine and his up as well. I looked around, perhaps I left it somewhere lying around in the room. Just a flash of light in the corner of my eye. The sun's warming rays reflected from the small metal object she threw towards me. I reached out with my left hand, then immediately regretted my muscle reflex. In my head I roared like a lion, but in reality I probably screamed like a small dog when someone steps on their tail. I could catch a small smile on her face as she peaked at me. For some abstract reason this filled my battered soul with joy.

Now, in the afternoon sunlight I could take a closer look at her. She was rather young, maybe twenty to twenty five years to her name. Brown hair coating her childish face, pointy nose, like a freshly sharpened knife. A young amazon. She was gorgeous, but not perfect. I remember the scar I saw on her left cheek last night. I could see calluses on her palms. Someone born in labor or war. I couldn't decide which was worse.

A shy smile is all she saw on my face as she looked at me, measuring me from top to bottom. I could hardly stand her gaze and looked away. This was my first time of not matching a lady's gaze. Perhaps I've grown weaker or it's just this damn hole in my shoulder. Whatever it was I had to get my posture back or I'll turn up dead on these streets.

The rest of the afternoon turned out eventless. We both gazed into the passing sun and just enjoyed the peace. The uneventfulness did good for my soul, I could put the happenings of yesterday to place in my mind. I managed to make sense of my decisions and some sort of loyalty started to form in my mind. Perhaps it's the radiating danger that was swimming in the air all around her was what initially caught me. I found solace in the fact that it was something other than blind love or horniness that made me go back for her.

I was too deep in between my own clouds to notice it and reacted too late. As I moved my right I could feel the blade pressed against my throat. I stopped in motion and slowly dropped my hand as my assailant didn't look like the patient type. Another day, another dude in Pulsearmor. Contrary to my encounter yesterday this fella was no knight. His armor was dirty and battle-worn, his face filled to the edges with scars and burns. His eyes radiated raw ferocity and professionalism. As I dropped my hands the blade was no longer pressing against my throat directly, but it was close enough that he could cut my throat before I could do anything. All I could do is let it play out and see where the tide brings us or maybe just me, since as I saw she disappeared without a trace.

I could hear two more walking around in the apartment looking for her. I doubt they would find anything. I'm not even sure I haven't just daydreamed the whole thing, but then I

tried to move my left and realized the error of my ways. I was certain this just happened and the proof was right there laying on my right on the table. The small metal cylinder.

The small shell carried a powerful tool, suitable for both melee and close range combat. The motion of quickly grabbing it and tearing apart my jailer was dancing around in my mind and I needed to remind myself every time that that would be my last move alive.

As these dogs sniffed all around the place I could not help, but notice their agitated state. She must've caused serious trouble. They sent a small squad after her and they tore the place apart for even a strand of her hair. I was asked no questions, was told nothing throughout this whole ordeal. They were not interested in my person the slightest or maybe I'll get a personal interrogator later. Just the thought of that sent chills down my spine.

Even though I was not the person they were looking for, I'm sure the HQ gangsters would have no problem tearing my body and mind apart even if I could offer them nothing, but a slight distraction from the everyday routine.

It seemed I was at the end of my rope, I had to check how much wiggle room I had. „Excuse me, could you please tell me who you people are and what you want?” – I asked with as much respect as I could push through without disgust.

I got no answer, just the blade swimming closer to my neck in the thick air. The room was filled with agitation and hurry. I promised myself I'd rather fight to my last breath than let these idiots take me in for questioning. The HQ wasn't known for their subtleness and mercifulness.

Just a moment before I was going to grab the lance a plea for mercy and a shriek filled the air. I was hoping my captor would be caught off guard and rush to help his mate, but no such thing happened. He stood where he was moments ago and held the blade to my throat as a statue. Moments later another roar of pain and suffering and suddenly we were left as two. Before I could react and defend myself he changed his grip on his knife and punched me in the nose with all his strength. He followed it up with a swift knee to my left shoulder and I was left seeing stars dance around in my vision. Immobilized by pain I could not move a muscle and just observed as he walked to the middle of the room.

The humming signaled that he turned up his Pulsearmor to max. Those that reached the Commander rank received a self-focused close combat training. While your everyday soldier would wield a pulserifle for ranged combat and either a lance or a sword for close combat, those that have received this training wielded all kinds of weapons, specialized for their style of combat and personality. This fella over here wielded a whip and a small shield. While the reach of this weaponry was much lower than that of the lance it was capable of dealing with multiple assailants much more effectively and if wielded properly could be turned into a single cable and used as a mid range lasso.

In the next moments my mind tried to follow the flow of combat, but I blacked out several times from pain and had trouble following faster moves. She wasted no time and pushed him towards the corner while keeping safe distance. Quick jabs with the lance had a significant range advantage and while the shield was effective blocking these blows, he was slowly forced to back off.

This fueled her even further and she let him get closer and closer with each thrust. It seemed as she had the upper hand, but at the last moment the shield snapped into position and blocked the next attack. She realized she could not get past his guard with these long range jabs so she slowly got closer and closer, using the lance as a true two handed weapon and

several thrusts managed to break the energy barrier of the shield. Unfortunately this was not enough as every time she got through she got too close and risked getting torn to shreds by the several blades slashing around her figure.

A quick jab threw fiery particles across the air as it collided with the barrier of the shield, this temporarily blocked the vision of both of them. While this cloud was in the way she decided for a deadly move. As a snake she raised the spear above her head and breached through the cloud to where his head was moments ago. I was waiting for the cold smack as the lance pierces human flesh and tears bones away, but could hear none.

She miscalculated the move or he got wind of it and dodged. Now completely defenseless with the lance raised forward she desperately tried to gain back her advantage. The whip was a much faster weapon this close. He swung with deadly precision and almost tore apart her left leg as she jumped up to avoid the hit.

The advantage of wielding multiple smaller weapons showed its face as she got hit point blank by a shield bash. The impact threw her against the wall of the room, while knocking her lance out of her hands. The cracking of bones was still as unpleasant of a sound as it used to.

I ordered my body to move, but nothing happened. I just sat there and watched as he got closer and closer to her, ready to tear her apart. The coy smile at the edge of his mouth signaled the end of the battle. I expected no different outcome, but was torn apart by how fast it ended.

One step and another. He got closer and closer. I shouted, but no voice came out. My body was paralyzed and she just laid there by the wall. This is how it will end, without mercy, forgotten, bathing in our own blood.

At the last second the sun reflected from the surface of a small knife flying straight towards his face out of nowhere. He knocked it away with a cackle temporarily blocking his sight of her. That's when it happened. She disappeared. I could not follow her moves, but she was standing behind him and I saw a small blade cut his throat, putting an end to his life.

He stood there frozen in motion for a second before buckling to the ground while he painted the wall crimson. I could not believe what just happened. She stood there, looking out the window, basking in the last few rays of the sun. It was the most badass sight I ever had the chance to behold.

„Seems I saved your hide yet again.” – she says it with the driest voice imaginable, while falling back into the chair she sat in smoking not long ago. I had problems processing what just happened. My brain kept repeating the last part, where she killed him. I could not make sense of her speed.

„I'm sorry you had to be part of this, but you got yourself into this. But where are my manners, since you're part of this. My name is Cyana.” The angel of death held her hand out towards me as a small greeting gesture.

„I'm Artos, thank you.” – That's all I could say, what a pathetic way to introduce yourself.

She changed my bloody bandages while I was busy regaining my strength. These few days have left a great mark on both my body and soul. I could not help, but stare. I was dazzled by her raw ferocity and beauty. These two qualities intertwined defined her every step.

„I wanted to say thank you as well. I guess you were the one that got me out of trouble last night. It seems I overestimated my qualities.”

„Well, yeah. But I think I still owe you one though.”

„Think nothing of it. And please, stop staring, you’re embarrassing me.”

I just realized I couldn’t get my eyes off of her. „Apologies. Now that you remind me I assume I met your friend last night. He called you by name while you were unconscious and knew the incantation of Horus from memory as well.” I’m still quite puzzled how he found us thought ...

„Oh, must have been Cyris. My mission coordinator. Always pushing his nose into stuff that’s not his business. I hope he’s alright.” She wasn’t mad at all, she was hiding her gaze, probably worried about his safety.

„I believe. I gave him the box and told him to leave, before that imperial guard could see him. Tough motherfucker chased us through half of the city.”

She glanced over at my shoulder. „I guess this is his doing then.” She touches he wound gently at the edge to my disliking. „I’m sorry.”

I say nothing. A woman touching my gently is nothing new to me, yet this all feels different, new. I can’t really pour it into words, but I just feel like I can fly when she looks or touches me. It’s totally insane, I know, but I think I fell in love with her.

„Is everything okay? You seem lost.” Surely seeing my face while I wonder if I really fell in love this time was unnatural. I quickly snap out of these clouds.

„Yeah. Everything’s fine. I was just thinking over a few things.”

„Cool. You see I gotta go. You should disappear for a while too. Will you be alright?” This shattered my world like a hammer on a glass window. She would just part ways this easily? Perhaps this truly was a one way affection, but this time I’m the fool in the situation. I just sigh and look at her.

„Yeah. I think I’ll be alright.” Takes a heavy heart to say this.

I sit there for a few more hours after she leaves. Submerging in my own despair. Master Cho always taught me to think with my head. But this time it’s different, I can feel this deep pain, this black hole in my chest. I can’t categorize it, it’s unlike anything I’ve felt before. I can’t say for sure if it’s love, but every minute is painful. Her scent still lingers around in the air and as it enters my nostrils I just lose all hope. I debate with myself for a few more minutes before the clarity can fill the holes in my mind.

Whatever may happen I need to take care of the situation right here and right now. There’s a can of gasoline behind bed in the room in the back. I’ll have to torch this place. After the disappearance of this small unit I’m sure they will send more. I can leave nothing behind.

I quickly pocket everything that’s useful and unidentifiable from the three corpses and light up the place. How will I explain this to Jerry? I guess we’ll cross that bridge when we get there.

One of the dogs had an unmarked P207 needlegun on him. Quite useful. No noise, unnoticeable impact. Had several magazines of different neural agents, paralyzers and a single magazine of deathpin. I've found some cash on them too. Will be enough to scrape by until I get to my apartment. That's probably compromised by the gangs too ... Fucking hell, what have I gotten myself into ...

Quite a stunning sight as I throw the matches and the whole place lights up. Could be a badass movie poster as I walk away from the flames. Man I watch too much cinema.

I walk away with a happy spirit this time, it is as if I took off the jacket of the past 20 years and just threw it in the fire to disintegrate. It was freeing, it was almost dazzling. I walked the streets for the rest of my time. Just enjoying being outside. The colors, the shapes, they were somehow different. Where I saw dark and bland I now see the light, the interesting, the colourful even. I wish this drug would last forever.

I took a scenic route by the Seila river and enjoyed the cold autumn wind dancing around my shoulders. I had no negative thoughts, nothing to worry about. The trees on the riverbank were mesmerising as they danced together with the wind, the occasional early leaf fell down, but as it did it got to see the world, it perhaps even saw the other side of the river. The noise of the city could not reach me, I could maybe even hear the birds chirping.

I walked the rest of the route downtown to my apartment. I looked in the mirror and saw something long forgotten, something incomprehensible that I missed throughout all these years. I was free of the shackles I bound myself in. Perhaps it was all an illusion put on by me. The countless times I got panic attacks from just thinking about rent, food, another heist, my path in the world. I now realize it was me, always thinking of tomorrow, when the present was right ahead of me, ready for the taking.

I could not shoulder this burden any more. I had the best night of sleep in a long time, no troubling dreams, no waking up in sweat from old nightmares. Just the clean dark. And in that void I found solace, I found peace.

The next day proved uneventful. I got some groceries in the morning, hit the gym before noon and felt more energetic than ever. The world bloomed wherever I went. The dark and gloomy faces all seemed a little happier. The dystopic vision was vandalized by a renaissance painter who was not afraid of vivid colours. The dress of that young girl on the swingset, adorned by sunflowers, the palm trees on that guys' shirt, the lone tree in the distance. The world felt talkative.

Through my blissful state of ignorance I failed to realize the woman I just bumped into. I was so flabbergasted by this new wondrous world that I completely forgot my bearings. I quickly apologized to her. She gave me a smile and nodded and moved on with her day. Truly wonderful I thought, maybe people weren't such douchebags afterall.

My opinion may have changed for the better regarding other human beings on this planet. I wonder how long it will last.