

50 Shades Inkier: A Story of Love, Loss and Lots of Tentacles

By Zedoker

For Taylorbros22, Tomkfc, Killrdarknes, dgam02, Furyfudge, ISneaky, Blazwura97, Revanrose6,  
EtherealSquid, Pab\_Jr and Stolio.

I'm sorry.

Authors Note: All characters somewhat were thrown into this story without much of a warning. All events are fictional and should not be considered as part of ECC's history. These are all fictional stories with fictional characters that bear minimal resemblance to real people. This is not a romance story, it's more of a coming of age story set in a country ravaged by destruction.

## Prologue

An entire country collapsed overnight, but no one knows or understands how. How could the disappearance of one man cause this? It seemed as though he had just phased through the walls and disappeared from his presidential palace. No one claimed responsibility, no one could have breached his security. No one knows how. The only thing that anyone knows is the hell that ensued afterwards. The nights were no longer dark, as the flames from the burning buildings kept a constant white night. No one knows how. No one knows why.

## Chapter 1

“Babe, can you start breakfast? I’ve got to get dressed and head off to work in a little bit”

“Of course my love, get nice and clean and I’ll make some eggs and potatoes.”

As he disappeared into the bathroom, I groaned. Another day of work means another day not spent with me. What was I to do? I was only in love with one of the most powerful men in the country. He had to make time for everyone else too, I guess.

As I went into the kitchen, I turned on the radio to hear the news.

“Wheat prices buffed to counter the poor growing season. Potatoes and sugarcane also nearing all-time highs,” the radio screamed “The mining industry is on the brink of collapse, fishing is non-existent, all sorts of animals are going extinct- polar bears, ghosts, you name it, it’s dying. More news at-”

Stolio shut it off before it could say more.

“Don’t worry about those stories, today is the day I’m going to fix it. Times are a little tough right now, but it’s nothing we can’t fix!”

I smiled eagerly, knowing that if he puts in as much love into the country as he does to me, he’d fix it all in no time. He wasn’t a quitter. He knew how to get things done AND be home by five for dinner. If anyone knew how demanding his job is, they’d think that him being with me as much as he is is seemingly impossible.

He wolfs down his breakfast and chugs his coffee that barely was out of the pot. He must be in a rush today. He stands up and grabs his briefcase.

“I’m sorry honey, I’ve really got to go, I just got a private message that there’s something urgent going on, I love you. Hopefully I’ll be able to resolve it quickly and be back for you” He whispers in my ear with the softest voice right before he kisses my neck and heads to the door.

“Have fun, please come back home to me Stolio” I say with a fleeting look towards the door.

“Always.”

## Chapter 2

My personal messenger buzzed. Again. Again. Damn, I thought I left it on AFK status while I cleaned.. I look over to it, messages from Stolio. My smile began to fade as I read what he had sent me.

“PACK WHAT YOU CAN, GET READY TO LEAVE.”

“ANDREWKM GONE.”

“WILL BE HOME SOON.”

What in the world could “ANDREWKM GONE” mean? Was our dear leader assassinated? Kidnapped? Does “gone” imply he resigned? Regardless, I packed up some clothes and some wedding pictures. I stared at the one with all of our friends with us. Andrew was there. This was long before he

was the president. He had been trying for weeks to grow out his hair at that point, but he ended up looking like a friar from the middle ages minus the potato sacks for clothing. What happened to him? Stolio looked so good at our wedding. Then again he looks good every day

“Damnit Zedo” I muttered to myself. I can’t think of him when I’m trying to pack for who knows what. I shoved some extra money into the backpack I was planning on carrying, who knows if I needed it. From the sounds of it, it didn’t sound like this was a temporary trip. I had no idea where we were going, so I had to pack for any type of weather.

The door slams open. As Stolio rushed in, the only thing I could notice was the blood. It looked like it had rained red outside. He also wielded a sword, also covered in blood. I hadn’t seen that sword since Stolio was a simple moderator on the front lines. God, was he cute with his sword.

“I’m cleaning up and we’re getting out. Get ready to run. I have a crossbow in the front closet, please tell me you know how to shoot it.”

“Uh... Yes, yes I do...” I stammered, “what’s going on out there?”

“Hell”

He stripped of his blood soaked clothes and started scraping the blood off his sword. He scraped up and down furiously, as if he couldn’t rub all of the blood off. His sword glistened. His long sword was the first thing that I had noticed about him ten years ago. He even had a name for it: Melony. He drunkenly poked me in the back with it at a bar. After apologizing about it for ten minutes, he finally got me a drink. He was charming, witty, but most importantly, he knew how to wield his sword, not with two hands like they teach in the academy, but with one. Looking back at it, it probably wasn’t smart to be wielding such a long sword with one hand, but he did it anyway.

He was a moderator back then. The lowest of the low in the government hierarchy. Flash forward to now, he was a presidential aide. He ran the moderators. He ran the supermoderators. He ran it all. Yet, even through the years, he always made time for me.

My thoughts were disturbed by Stolio grabbing the backpack I had prepared for him. “I’m ready, let’s go. We need to go before the Bo\_ gang gets word of this, it’s going to turn to super hell once they do”

“Where are we going honey?”

“I don’t know. Let’s start going east. We need to make it out of MainCentral before nightfall.”

“Hopefully we can get others out too, Tom lives down the road, so does Sneketh and Blaze.”

“Maybe... depends on how bad it got out there.”

We stepped out the door and walked to the end of the driveway. I looked back at our home, trying to take a good look at the little place of the world that was ours. I looked back, somehow knowing that this would be the last time I would see the place Stolio and I called home. I held back tears as Stolio silently checked the street. For now it was empty. It would not quiet be that way for a long, long time. We departed, never looking back as we made our way east.

### **Chapter 3**

*3 months later*

The morning sunshine glistened through the broken windows of the church where we bunkered down. We were in no mans’ land. The space between all the different factions that had formed. To the west, the “Bo Clan” had taken the capital city and the majority of what was formerly the state of MainCentral. They were ruthless hunters. They seemed to have advanced technology that made them see

through walls, lock onto other people, and much more. These sorts of technologies were illegal back before Andrew had left, only to be used by the most powerful of his aids in order to track down anyone using them.

To the north, the “Founders” had claimed to find a new and peaceful way of life, but it was impossible to imagine any sort of peace. The state of MainNorth was a desolate place anyways. Not many people lived there, resources were scarce. While the “Founders” were setting up a new society, not many could forget about the failure that some notable members had in breaking away from the country previously. Many had perished.

The east was held by a mysterious society. No one knows who founded them. The only indication that they had of their existence were banners of a squid scattered on the border. No one who crossed the border made it back. They had access to the ocean, along with the city of Zenith, the former capital of the state of MainEast. From our reports, Zenith was untouched when the country collapsed. The promise of a shiny city within the relatively undiscovered wilderness of the state of MainEast proved to be a strong motivation for the hundreds of people who fled there. No one knows if they made it there, but rumor has it that Zenith is a purely peaceful haven surrounded by death and destruction.

MainSouth and MainWest, the last two states in EcoCityCraft were a shitshow. While a strong group had made their presence known in the other states, these states had no such leaders. Clans like the Reps, America and the Staff had made their marks, but never united the whole state. A small group of former moderators tried to unite the two states together, but their inexperience with leadership made them collapse into their own mini-clans. The fighting was most brutal in the unofficial territories, as resources were even more scarce in the desert of MainSouth, and dozens of small clans fought to survive.

The former government officials and military disbanded almost instantaneously when President Andrew left. They spread their own ways. My love, Stolio, was well honored amongst the government. When we fled, we found various moderators and supermoderators and even a couple of GameAdmins to band together in no man's land. We made a small society with strict rules. Stolio and I, along with our old friend (and my ex-lover) Tom were the only ones with the keys to where we kept the weapons. Taylor, Fury, killr and dgam were the outer patrol. They could have weapons, but only to scavenge for supplies. Everyone else had to stay within the small walls that we had made.

No one bothered to mess with us. We were small, had limited supplies, and weren't a threat to any of the larger clans. They were too busy fighting each other to notice us, and like vultures, we picked what we could after any skirmishes.

Even though we were “safe,” Stolio was always on edge. He never slept. He walked around, sword in hand, swinging it, as he was practicing on unseen foes. I know he hadn't used it in a while, but surely he wasn't completely out of practice. I couldn't help but be selfish. I wanted him, I wanted the life we had before. I wanted to continue our happy life, have kids, adopt an ocelot or a polar bear before they go extinct. All of that was taken away. The man I loved grew colder by the day. I can't help but cry every single night when he wasn't by my side. That was every night. I barely could hold him, I hadn't slept with his arms around me in almost a week. I hadn't felt his love since then as well.

Every single day, he grew distant. Every single day, I longed for him. I longed for a normal life too, but mostly him. I talked with Taylor constantly about Stolio.

“Well recently he's been talking about just shooting his shot and just going east. He believes in it. I think it's too good to be true... a beacon of hope in this dark world? Come on!” Taylor said in an

annoyed voice. I had been begging him to tell me what he had heard from Stolio, because now I wasn't getting anything from him.

"It may be too good to be true, but we have to hold on to something. There's no point in staying here if we can't look towards something to make it all worth it. I believe in it, but I just wish Stolio told me that instead of muttering it like a madman. I can't say anything to him, I just get the blank stare from his eyes. I miss the light in his eyes, I haven't seen them in so long.

"Zedo... I can't tell you how to wake him up. From what I remember when we worked together, he always talked about you. He talked about his hopes and dreams with you. He's still there, just this whole situation has brought out the worst in a lot of people. Just make sure to let him know that you haven't given up on him."

"I suppose..." I muttered, hating to admit that all those words that Stolio told me seemed like ages ago. He was right, I needed to tell Stolio how I felt and that I loved him no matter what was going on in the world.

I thought about how I wanted to tell him. The right words seemed to slip in and out of my mind. Before I knew it, night came. I didn't have a chance to blink before I dozed off right where I was seated against the altar of the church.

## Chapter 4

"Zedo, GET UP."

I snapped to attention. The roof of the church was on fire.

"The Bo Clan decided that no man's land is theirs, we gotta go NOW" Stolio yelled at me. I've never heard him yell like this. Even in this rush I was taken aback by his eyes. Fierce, yet with a touch of loving. I got up and gathered my things immediately.

"Fury and Tom have been setting traps in a couple of the buildings, we don't have much-LOOK OUT!" he yelled as a flaming pillar collapsed in between us. "Go east to the dance club, get into the basement, I'll meet you there. If I'm not there by tonight just keep heading east to whoever is out there, GO!"

"I won't leave you Stolio."

"Don't be an idiot, I'll be there just GO! NOW ZEDO!"

I started running. I looked back, just for a single glance of him. Our eyes met. Standing over a burning pillar, sword drawn one handedly yet again. He needs to re-learn how to handle his sword with two hands, I've never used a sword before because I don't have one, but I heard you get a better grip, more thrust, and you're really able to penetrate armor with the greater force that you could produce. Then again, who knows, maybe the academy is old school, we're in a whole new world now. Speed seems to be the name of the game, not force.

I took advantage of the chaos to make my escape to the club. Once EcoCityCrafts foremost club for dancing and avid music lovers, the building was barely there. The office in the basement remained, and that is where I took shelter. I just hope Stolio knew where to find me.

Hours passed. The day turned into night. Each passing minute was agonizing. I knew I had to leave by the morning. The Bo clan was going to turn each and every building into their land, but surely they weren't foolish enough to go at night where they weren't safe, even with their auras that would immediately target anyone within a certain radius of them.

Footsteps thudded above. I braced myself with my crossbow, pointing it at the door to the collapsed staircase. I just hope that I don't prematurely shoot off my bolt. During drills back at the church, I had an unfortunate tendency to do that. Once, I had even hit Tom in the crossfire and removing my bolt from his side was not a fun experience.

"Zedo, are you here?" A familiar voice asked, barely loud enough for me to hear.

My voice heightened. "Stolio?"

"No it's me, Sneaky. Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine, where's Stolio."

"He... He..." stammered Sneaky, "He didn't make it. We got ambushed as we were heading out. He held them back so we could escape. We spread out, some of us are hiding in the nearby shops. We'll head east in the morning... I'm so sorry Zedo."

My whole world stopped. I opened my mouth, but nothing but sobs came out.

"He took out some of them, but he couldn't take them all. Two handed swordsmanship is slower, but more effective per strike, he couldn't push them back to handle one at a time. He...He was a hero."

I still couldn't utter a sound. I just sat there with my heavy heart and inaudible sobs. Sneaky came down to me and wrapped his arms around me.

"None of us would be here without him. We owe it to him to go east and try to continue our lives the best we can."

"Not without him." I croaked out.

"I know, but I'm here now. I won't leave you." Sneaky said, leaning closer into me, arms wrapping tighter around me. We cried together, and spent the rest of the dreary night reminiscing about Stolio and the old days, amongst other things.

## Chapter 5

The early morning light crept onto our faces through the floorboards and shattered tiles of the dancefloor above.

"Sneaky, wake up, I think it's time to go find the rest of us, where to?"

"Huh, oh, uhm... we didn't have a rendezvous point near here, just meet at the border between no-mans land and the eastern clan by dusk tonight, then we all go in together. Let's get a move on, we'll have to move slowly to avoid detection from the Bo's. They have a sort of aimbot that assists them. They can also see through some walls somehow, I didn't even know that was possible."

"Then let's get a move on sleepyhead." We started on the staircase. Sneaky checked the main floor, indicating nothing in sight. We went behind all the buildings, checking both ways before scampering onwards. The closer we got to the east, the less likely we'd run into the Bo clan.

We found ourselves on one side of one of the last roads before the dense forest that marked the end of no-man's land. It was a major road that had several lanes of emptiness, no cover, nothing at all. We checked behind us and listened as intensely as we could to make sure no one had followed us.

"Well, here goes nothing." Sneaky sighed. We both bolted across, but the whizzing of arrows made our bolt into a disaster.

"What the- SHIT" Sneaky yelled as an arrow hit him in the leg. He fell to the ground as I kept running, not even turning back to see who had shot him. "Run..." He said in a shaky voice. I couldn't help. I ran across and jumped into a ditch and covered myself in as much dirt as I could to hide myself.

I must have laid there for hours before I decided to check to see if it was safe. Looks like the road was the end of the line for the Bo Clan, but that didn't stop them from taking Sneaky. Both Stolio and Sneaky were gone. I had no idea where I was, I had no idea who else I had lost. I had nothing except my crossbow and the raggy clothes I had on. The only thing that I know is that I had to keep going.

I trudged through the dense forest until the light faded. I had no water and was beginning to feel it. I came across a clearing and saw the stars. This is what the state of MainEast was, lush forests and stars. I sat down.

"Well, if there's any place to go, this wouldn't be the worst." I muttered to myself.

"Who says you have to go?"

I turned around, a hooded figure wearing all black approached me. I was too weak to get my crossbow and I sat there accepting my fate.

He had no weapons out, instead he simply said "I'm Squid, welcome to the Ink Clan. Let me take you to Zenith and get you patched up."

## **Chapter 6**

*1 week later*

Zenith was beautiful. Well, about as beautiful as a city that survived the crumbling of the country around it could be. After miles of woods and wilderness, Zenith loomed large and tall, relatively untouched by the hell going outside its borders. The Ink Clan took control of the city relatively swiftly, and as a result they were able to keep much of it intact. Shops were full of fish and other goods that the ocean produced. It seemed as though nothing had changed at all.

In charge of it all was Squid, a gentle man with a large stick, so to speak. He walked amongst the people daily on the streets and in the markets, but there was an aura of importance around him. He radiated a swagger that I had never seen before. I was immediately attracted to his energy, I hadn't been around someone with this much power since Stolio. Before this all happened, he wasn't a former moderator or part of the government. Instead, he was a simple farmer boy. He traded his carrots and melons for Ecodollars and saved all of them up to get resident in the city of Zenith. He was headed into the city when the news broke out, and instead of running, he went to the city hall and yelled at people to relax and to listen to him. The old mayor, Blazywury, was nowhere to be found. While some listened, it wasn't until the local SuperModerator in command of Zenith barked out orders that everyone started preparing to stay. Pab, as he later introduced himself, now handles all of the Ink Clan's military strategy, including handling of the frontlines so that Squid could focus on the city. He was a militaristic guy with a short fuse. He wanted more than what we had, but Squid calmed him down well.

To me, there didn't seem to be much of a "strategy" to protecting the Ink Clan's land. Anyone who clearly was coming to cause harm was shot down. On the other hand, there wasn't much strategy to unite the country once again. Squid had always said that Zenith was enough for him. I often enjoyed walking the market with Squid. I spent the last couple of days with him, we often had dinner, wine was plenty through all the shops and farmers who enjoyed the land. One dinner, I was surprised by some of the survivors of no-man's land. Tom, Taylor, Killr and Fury had all made it. Others did not.

"They came for us too quickly"

"Nowhere to hide, we just kept running"

"I don't know how they were hitting us, it was like their arrows locked onto us."

These were all of what I heard. They tried to not talk about Stolio around me, but I didn't care. All the death around me had made me numb to it, even to someone who I was ready to give my life to. I didn't need anyone, yet I needed everyone. I spent time with Tom and Taylor frequently and closely. Tom was my first friend and first love, and Taylor was my best friend. I needed them, but not as much as I needed Squid. I needed authority in my life now, I needed someone to lay down some sort of law on me in this time of lawlessness. Zenith did that for me, Squid did that for me.

One drizzly morning, Squid and I walked in the market, picking out some eggs for breakfast when a town crier ran past us yelling "Bo Clan pushes past the front line to the Zwunder River, prepare for Code White"

"Well... that's not good" muttered Squid, "This is the second time they've done that in the last two weeks. Before it only happened once. Meet me at the capitol building in about 20 minutes."

"What's a code white?" I asked

"Just a precaution to finish up shopping, they're still miles out if at the river, gotta go!"

This couldn't be happening. The Bo Clan was at it again. They must have heard about the reality of Zenith and were coming to destroy it. I wouldn't let this happen.

I made my way to the capitol building. It had a statue of President Andrew on the front with roses laying in front of it. After all these months, the people here had hope that he was still out there. Fools. I headed inside to a makeshift boardroom filled with the higher ranking officials of the Ink Clan. They all looked uneasy.

"This attack is different. They seemingly have more numbers, and due to their x-ray vision, they can see where our scouts and snipers are. We have them held up at the river now, but we have to act fast. Pab explained with a booming voice to the table. "My best course of action is that we blitzkrieg them by circling around and flanking them from all sides, sort of like a squid clamping its tentacles around a fish. Afterwards, we should be able to take MainCentral and put an end to all this once and for all."

"Pab, I've told you before, we're here to keep our people safe, not take more than what we're given. It's just going to lead to bad things." Squid angrily replied.

"Squid, if we don't take MainCentral, the Bo clan is just going to keep doing this, they're going to enslave all the others and force them to fight and die. This way, we can unite not just MainCentral, but the country as a whole. The Tentacle Offensive is the best way. Besides... I already designed a new banner."

Tom then unleashed a large banner from behind him. He stood it up, proud as could be. Clearly he had designed this banner. He unraveled it to show a pitch black banner with blueish-grey tentacles protruding from the center.

"This is us. Each tentacle represents a value of the Ink Clan, but all of them make up the Squid. Without one tentacle, the squid is weakened." Tom beamed as he explained himself.

"That's one ugly squid, but I understand where you're coming from. I want what's best for the people of Zenith and the Ink Clan, and if this is what everyone wants, we have to strike fast." Squid responded.

That's when the bombs came down.

## Chapter 7



The city of Zenith was on the easternmost part of the coast of EcoCityCraft. This was it. If the Bo Clan took Zenith, the east was all theirs. Luckily, the capitol building was built outside of the downtown when it was bombarded. The bombs were a small indication of what was to come next.

“Set up the perimeter around the capitol and the road to downtown and put the city on high alert” Squid barked out. The people were in danger, and now he was serious. His weapon of choice was a surprising one. He had a simple bow but then a steel-clad hoe that was sharpened on the end. He was war ready now, which contrasted how I met him and learned to love him. He changed the same way as Stolio right before he went cold on me.

I began to feel sick. I felt sick in a completely different way, it wasn't due to the carnage around me. It almost felt like-

“Zedo, you good?” Squid whispered, sitting down next to me. “They’re almost here, and I want you to be safe.”

“Yea, I think I’m fine.”

“Good, well sit tight, I’m making final arrangements. We’ll rendezvous back here after we push them back so we can go forth and surround them.”

“Where do you want me?” I asked him

“Next to me”

We fought. Every able bodied person from Zenith fought. We pushed them back to the river and held our ground. They were relentless. I know that they had enslaved people from MainCentral to join their army, but they fought with such numbers that there were times where I couldn’t believe we had conquered them. Once at the river, Squid and I had to fall back to the capitol building to meet with Pab before moving on to end them once and for all.

“Soon we’ll be able to plant our tentacles in MainCentral,” Pab squeaked out, “I have Tom leading the northern flank and I’ll be leading the south. We need a distraction up the middle so that they don’t see us coming from behind.”

“We’ll handle it, the most important part is that we don’t let them through the middle!” Squid confidently replied.

“Don’t make a push from the river, just hold the line there, they’ll have to regroup and push again and that will be our chance.” Pab uttered before he took off with Taylor and Fury to the south.

Squid watched him depart and then turned to me “Zedo, it’ll all be alright you know.” He said with a smile on his face. We embraced.

“Squid, I think I’m-”

He cut me off, “Don’t think now, just do,” and kept embracing me. “Let’s go”

Not what I meant to say, but in my heart I knew I could tell him afterwards. We left for the front lines, determined to make our stand.

When we got closer to the front, we had noticed that it was eerily quiet. Killr had reported that the amount of crossfire wound down about an hour ago. Seemingly they’re preparing for a full assault on us. We took our positions on the higher banks of the river and watched for any sign of movement. We knew that we had to make some noise so that the flanking teams would know when to move in.

“What if we crossed the river to draw them out? We need them to engage us” Killr pointed out.

“It’s too risky, Pab said to stay here and they’ll come to us.” I followed up.

Squid and his non-tactical mind chimed in. “Actually, I agree with that. Pab and Tom must be in position already, we need to act now and prod them into a fight.”

“You heard what Pab said, we can’t”

“Now or never.... CHARGE!” Squid screamed at the top of his lungs. Everyone who had been waiting looked over at us for a brief moment, then began to cross the shallow river. Arrows had begun to rain down on top of us. With no cover, the half that took quicker action when Squid yelled were forced to move up, and the other half of us were forced back to the side where we came from. Arrows whizzed back and forth around the ones on the other side, and then the Bos came out from the trees. They hacked and slashed with speeds I have never seen before. Stolio and his single handed sword wielding would have never had the speed to block the swords from the Bo’s. Squid and some of the troops had formed a circle and were battling as hard as they could. Those of us with bows fired, but the rest of us could only watch. A figure wearing full armor approached them, and with such speed and mastery had slashed down all in the circle but Squid. I finally came out of the state of shock I was in and grabbed my crossbow and aimed, but it was too late. Without even lifting his hoe, Squid was struck by the figure across his chest.

“NO” I let out in a blood curdling screech as I shot my crossbow at the figure. I managed to hit them in the kink in his armor between their helmet and his chestpiece. I watched them crumple to the ground and fall over. In my fit of rage I waded across the river and shot at anyone on the other side who had moved. I had to make my way to Squid.

I found him sitting against a tree a couple meters away from where he was struck. He gazed up at me as I approached him, still with that dumb smile against his face.

“Well this sucks, doesn’t it” He whimpered out, still smiling through the pain.

“Yea, it sucks that you can’t listen to instructions.”

“Worth it. Now I get to die with a view of my favorite river and the prettiest girl I’ve ever seen.”

“You’re not dying.”

“Sadly, I am... What did you want to tell me? I know I said it’s an after thing, but now seems as good a time as any.”

“Squid...” I paused, looking at his eyes as they began to close. “I’m pregnant.”

“You’ll... you’ll be a great mom, just don’t forget to take care of yourself.” He said with his last breath, and just like that, Squid was gone.

Not even a moment had gone by for me to collect myself when I heard the leaves rustle behind me. I spun around, grabbing my crossbow mid spin and shooting it off. The arrow connected straight into the heart, and as I looked up from the arrow, my shock turned into despair as I realized what I had done. Looking straight at me with his piercing blue eyes, was Tom.

## Chapter 8

My entire world froze. I dropped my crossbow and dropped to my knees. I’d been on my knees plenty these days, but never for this. Never for my newfound love to be struck down and for me to shoot my former lover. I stared straight up in the sky, as for this moment, I was the one responsible for what happened. I couldn’t blame Andrew, the Bo clan or even Stolio for any of this. If only I held back Squid, both him and Tom would still be alive. Now, I have lost both of them.

Pab’s voice broke my thoughts “Zedo, what... what happened?”

“I heard rustling and thought it was them, I couldn’t see him. I couldn’t tell. I couldn’t see him...” My voice trailed off. I kept saying the words but no sounds came out of my mouth.

“It’s over Zedo. The armor-clad leader was Dreb, the leader of the Bo clan. They’ve fallen back and victory is basically ours.”

"I couldn't see him..."

"Taylor, we need you now. Zedo isn't in a good place."

"I can see that General Obvious, I got her, you go secure the border" Taylor plopped down next to me. I could see the blood stains on his shirt. "So what's up" he calmly questioned.

I lost it. I started weeping uncontrollably into Taylor's shoulder.

"There now, there now Zedo"

"I... I told him I'm pregnant... but I don't know whose it is." I muttered in between my sobs.

"Oh, well... who is it between?"

"I've told you everything Taylor, you know who"

"So... me, Squid, Tom, Sneaky and..." he trailed off

"Stolio."

"Oh..." He trailed off. We sat there for a while. The sound of explosions began to grow quieter and quieter until we couldn't hear them any longer. The day turned into night. When the night turned into day, Taylor got up and brushed himself off. He turned to me and I met his gaze. He gave me a slight half-smile and I gave him back.

"I don't care whose baby it is. No one else is around, and I promise you I sure as hell will be there. I know you've probably been promised it before, but this is a promise that won't be broken. Now, let's go and finish what Squid and all of them started."

He pulled me up and dusted me off. He took my hand as we walked to the front lines, together, nothing separating us.

## **Chapter 9**

*4 months later*

Ecocitycraft was almost won. The last couple of months we all worked tirelessly in order to make sure that every single inch of the country was at peace. We took over the Bo Clan's grip on MainCentral within a week of their failure of an assault. MainNorth fell soon afterwards. The toughest was getting the minor clans in the South and the West. The America Clan, led by Secretary Revan, agreed to a peace agreement with us. Apparently, the Bo Clan decided to hit them before us. They did much more damage to them and they couldn't afford to fight us. General Pab led a small strike force to hit the Rep clan, they succeeded, but not without losing Pab.

Even to this day, we are still in the process of uniting the country. The desert of the west hid many caverns where the remainder of Bo Clan hideout. Fury was on a mission to hunt them down. Killr had retired from military service and was focused on peacekeeping on the home front. I too, had to retire from everything due to my belly getting bigger and bigger by the day. I wanted to keep trucking along, but Taylor made me stop. I think that his newfound presidency made him a little loopy in the head. While Squid was a president with a big stick, Taylor was more of a build-up president. He preferred to take things slow, take time to explore options and then lay it all on the best course of action.

Taylor made me do boring tasks. For instance, coming up with a name for the new country we were creating. To him, Ink Clan promoted the idea of factions, and that directly opposed unity. The multi-tentacle flag of the Ink Clan flew over every building all over Zenith and what remained in the other states. For the first time in months, I finally felt peace. I felt as though there was a future, not just for me, but for my children. The fantasy I once felt with Stolio was finally coming true, but in some weird twisted way. I wasn't with Stolio, nor with his children.

There was one journey that I needed to take, however. I needed answers. I needed to know why Stolio had to die. Why Sneaky had to die. Why my friends had fallen and millions had lost their lives. I needed to find Andrew.

## **Chapter 10**

Another 5 months passed. EcoCityCraft was united once again. Squid's vision of a united country finally came true. My two sons, Bobby and Theo were born in a unified country. They seemed to have some of the features of all of their potential dads. Stolio's eyes, Tom's nose, Sneaky's fingers, Taylor's toes and Squid's hair. I didn't want them to know anyone but Taylor, however. He was their dad, and he was going to make a great one.

I had no time to waste. I needed to find my answers, even if that meant sacrificing the time I had with my babies. My need to know why had to be fulfilled. The new tentacle-clad flags of EcoCityCraft flew high over every mountain and every valley. For the first time in months, we were not groups of individual people, but a country. There were dissenters, sure, but nothing like just a few months ago. It was time to find the answers as to why this all started.

I set out to every known corner of the country. From the harsh winter winds of the North to the tropical coast of the South. Andrew wouldn't have disappeared to somewhere else. He's out there, I know it, and nothing will stop me from finding him. If it took me years, that would be fine. Taylor didn't need me to rebuild. I promised to stop and check in once every couple of months, and to not die. It was time for the truth to come out, regardless if I was ready for it. It wasn't for me, though. It was for those who didn't make it to today. It's for those who couldn't make it to a brighter day. It's for those who couldn't be there to see how far we've come. Our time for closure had come.

## **Epilogue**

The sand crunched underneath my feet as I came closer to the tent. For years, we had searched for the former president, only to find him in the middle of nowhere in the desert in MainSouth. I didn't come for him to unite us, not for him to tell us what to do, but instead to tell us why. The answer was coming clear. In the middle of all this desert and nothingness a single red and white circus tent stood. So many of my friends had died because of him. Stolio died for this. Surprisingly, I wasn't mad. Instead I just need clarity. I needed to know why he left and caused all the suffering that ensued.

We had worked hard to create a better future for everyone. For us, for me, for my children. It took so many people to unite us, but only one to cause this in the first place.

The door flaps fluttered open. A bearded figure glanced out. It seemed as though he hadn't seen another living soul for years.

"Mr. President. After all these years, it's time to talk"

He kept staring at me. Without saying a word, he beckoned for me to come inside. I refused.

"I'm only here for one thing and one thing only. Why did you leave us? Why did you leave your country?"

"Stolio was a good man. Seeing how he isn't with you, he must be dead."

I nodded. "Answer the question."

"It's not a simple question."

"ANSWER THE QUESTION, DAMNIT." I was getting pissed.

“Usually when people have a question, they have to send me a private message on the government website, I don’t really like to be forced to answer things in person.”

I held up my crossbow, finger on the trigger. “I have a tendency to prematurely shoot my bolt, so I’d start talking.”

“You want to know why I left? Not because I wanted all this to happen, clearly. I couldn’t do it anymore. I made EcoCityCraft what it was and ran the country for years, but no one ever talked about it. No one.”

“That’s bullshit and you know it. We were there in the country you created, happy as can be. We had lives, formed friends, found love. While we never outrightly said that we loved all that you did, you can see from the relationships formed across the many years that we were here to stay and did what we could to make this place as special as possible.”

“I don’t mean to be selfish, but at least some direct acknowledgement would suffice.”

“Direct or indirect, the relationships that we’ve built are real. I’m sure that you’ve experienced it with those who served with you. At Stolio and my wedding, you were there celebrating a part of what you helped indirectly create. You created this country for us, and this country means everything to us, otherwise where would we be now? What is going on now is starting to go back to what that was. We finally have peace.”

“I guess I never really thought about the relationships formed as part of the gratitude for the country I created, I’ve had so many people come and go across the years I guess I was scared to lose it all.”

“Every single relationship that was formed in EcoCityCraft was all thanks to you. These are friendships that are never going to end, and loves that cannot be squashed by death. All thanks to you.”

“What do we do now.”

“I... I don’t know.”

As we looked at each other, the desert sun began to succumb to the crescent moon. A cooling wind began to descend upon the desert, making the once horribly hot air into a surprisingly soothing one. All around EcoCityCraft, night was falling on the final day of fighting. The final resistant clans had given in to the notion of peace that the Squid Clan had started. A new day was emerging, one full of challenges and redemption, yet so promising for the days and years that lay ahead.