

And with that they fled, Chi's hand firmly around XXXX's fingers, dragging him along with her as she clutched the strange, blue and black sword to her chest almost desperately. She didn't understand—*couldn't* understand—but whatever the blade was, it was their chance, *their* only chance. For that reason she didn't so much as glance back as she pulled them away into the night, fleeing the carnage and the smell of blood and death that now hung fresh amongst the shadow of the trees.

Then again, even if they had looked back, they wouldn't have seen the figure watching them flee through the trees, gaze following them until she and XXXX slipped away into the darkness. On the other hand, they *might* have heard the man speak aloud after a minute of standing there in silence, the words in a tongue unlike any Chi had ever heard.

"Think we're in the clear?"

The answer came in silence, displayed only as words that spelled themselves out in rapid blue text across the man's grey eyes.

*I believe so. I was afraid you were going to have to intervene for a moment there.*

"You and me both," the figure snorted into the quiet. "But she did just fine in the end. Girl can handle herself, apparently."

*Agreed. That being said, Endwalker is now an unnecessary draw. Shall we disable it?*

"Oh, right. Sure thing."

In a static flicker of dim light the stranger's form shimmered into being, appearing from the nothingness it had been cloaked in. For a second the black plating of the alien armor that covered every inch of him glinted in the glow of the dark blue lines of light that accented the clean steel, the wash particularly bright in the dark. Then even the armor retracted, whirling away from the man's body in a blink to reform as nothing more than the slim bands of black and white metal hanging from the man's wrists, the glimmer of the three gems embedded in each of them mostly hidden beneath the cuffs of an odd, leathery jacket.

Turning away from the scene, the stranger reached up one scarred hand to tousle his long white hair back into some presentable form, tucking a few loose strands of it behind an ear decorated with a black steel loop and cuff. Careful not to make any noise, he started picking his way carefully through the forest, seeking a spot even deeper within the trees.

*Oh and that was clever, the text spelled out in his vision again. The thought to manifest Shard 27 in a familiar shape. She didn't hesitate like some of the others.*

"She needed a weapon, and their swords are pretty distinct here," the man answered with a nod. "Reminiscent of pre-ISC China on Earth, if I'm right." He glanced back over his shoulder. "Makes you wonder what the hell is going on, right? I know staying long isn't a good idea, but every time we jump I can't help but wonder what kind of crap these kids have gotten themselves into..."

*Agreed. In fact, I don't imagine they even know we're on Mars.*

That had the man blinking in surprise. "Are we? I didn't even realize."

*Indeed. If you want to take us off-planet, I can show you where Earth is in the—*

"No, but thanks." The interruption came with a chuckle. "*Someone's* already gonna be pissed I didn't bring her as is. No need make more trouble for myself."

And then, with a last thought, the stranger was gone, blinking out of existence to leave nothing but a faint rustle of wind among the grass and leaves.