

Wren had been on the island for a few days now. There wasn't much to see he thought, unless you liked nature. When first arriving he had made a quick sweep of the place, finding that the island was a lot smaller than he thought it would be. He had spotted other people as well, but had managed to stay out of sight. He didn't want to go around and pick fights that were completely pointless, especially if he could just snatch Sunnie and get the hell out of there without attracting attention.

They were a weird bunch though he thought. Some of them didn't even look like humans. He remembered seeing some weird robot-like humanoid with a long tail. Another one was a little green midget, accompanied by a half-human half-fox... or something. He had also seen quite a few women about, something he didn't like. Not that he had any second thoughts about killing them. It was just more fun curb-stomping men.

Finding no clues at all as to Sunnie's whereabouts he had decided to look more methodically, starting in the southern parts.

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Wren looked out over the stinky and damp marshlands before him. Ignoring the mosquito's annoying buzz he inhaled the damp and odoriferous air, giving off a light cough.

Breaking off a stick from a nearby tree, he poked it into the soft ground before him. A gurgling sound was heard as a few air-bubbles made their way to the muddy surface.

"Ugh. I'm not sticking my feet into that disgusting swamp." Wren muttered as he let the stick go, watching it slowly sink down into the brown goo.

There was something alive in the marshes though, he could feel that much at least. Though he doubted it was Sunnie. Perhaps it was someone who knew where she was being held, or it could even be one of those... contestants. That, or wild animals, he thought. Probably the latter.

Wren sighed and looked over his shoulder, making sure nobody was watching. After making sure the coast was clear, he made a short jump up in the air. To his surprise he actually landed again. He quirked a brow looking around again, but no one was in sight. He bounced up and down a few more times before shattering a nearby rock with a frustrated kick.

"Fine! Fuck flying, you stupid piece-of-shit island!" he lashed out as he grabbed one of the smaller trees by its trunk. His strong hands squeezed it tight making two large hand-indentations where he held it. Giving it a quick jerk, he uprooted the tree a bit, sending it toppling over the stinking puddle before him.

The sound of the crumbling tree echoed out into the distance behind him. A few birds that were sitting in the nearby trees took flight, frightened by the noise but the marshes before him were ever quiet. Wren took a few confident steps forward on the newly-felled tree and ventured onwards.

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It was afternoon already. Wren was surprised the time had passed so quickly in this god-forsaken place and he had managed to avoid stepping on the foul ground as well, making use of the trees, trunks and rocks sticking up from the ground.

He had found a rather big tree to sit in and he was now taking rest on one of the branches in the warm rays of the sun, making life feel at least a little easier, for now. He shifted his weight on the branch, turning the volume up on his music player, replacing the silence around him with soothing

melodies. The smell was even fouler now when he was deep in the marshes and the insects were even more annoying. At least the latter he could do something about.

A small smirk spread across his lips as he held out his hand in front of him, whispering a short incantation. The air around him started to pop and frazzle, streaks of lightning shooting out from his hand, frying every flying bug and insect around him for several yards. Feeling rather pleased with the mass murdering of innocent creatures, he leaned back against the trunk. He felt comfortable, but the peace was short-lasting.

Through the corner of his eye he saw something move, a reflection in the sun. Wren sat up straight, removing the earphones and looking towards the thicket where he saw the gleam coming from. It was harder to see now when he was looking straight at it, but there was definitely something there. Wren put his music player away into his backpack and after making sure it was sitting securely on the branch he got up in a crouching position, waiting for the source of the movement to reveal itself.

A young man emerged from the bushes. He looked a bit short Wren thought and he was busy swatting away some mosquito's from his blonde unruly hair. The young man took a few swift steps on to a big rock, tapping his boots against its side to get rid of some of the excess mud and goop. The youngster seemed unarmed, though Wren figured that there could be weapons concealed under his brown coat. On his shoulders was a pair of spaulders which were polished to a mirror shine, reflecting the sunlight as he moved. Wren could see that one of them had some sort of crest engraved on them.

The young man sent a few more insects to meet an early grave as he flailed his arm around. He adjusted the yellow scarf around his neck and held up his other hand to block the bright sunlight that was stinging in his eyes. That's when he saw the silhouette of someone, or something up in the tree. The young man seemed a little startled at first, but kept his composure and stared back up at Wren from his rock.

"Who's there?" he called out, squinting his eyes as he tried to make out Wren's features.

"If you step down from the rock, I will come down." Wren replied.

He quirked a brow at that, his eyes quickly shifting to the rock he sat on and then back up to Wren. "Why?"

"I'm not gonna put my feet down in the mud."

The young man seemed surprised by the response. He mumbled something to himself and stepped back to the edge of the rock. "There's plenty of room here for you now. But I'm warning you, don't try anything."

Wren snickered and took a giant leap, soaring through the air and landing on the stone with a thud. Straightening his back, he looked down at shorter man before him. He didn't really look like much Wren thought, but standing face to face with him he was actually taller than Wren first had perceived. But he was still pretty scrawny and his blue eyes reflected a feeling of innocence. "What's your name, kid?"

He seemed a bit offended at that, frowning at Wren's remark. "Grey, Grey Vanska. And you?"

"Wren. You, you're here for this 'tournament' too?"

Grey nodded slightly, his body tensing up a bit as he clenched his fists examining his opponent. Wren looked pretty strong though he was simply dressed, with funky looking shoes Grey noted. Maybe there was something special about them since he didn't want to get them wet? There was also something about his eyes, as they moved they seemed to shift color, from purple to red and then to blue and green. "Kyrie! She's--"

"Just give up now. And I won't have to hurt you." Wren said, interrupting Grey.

He frowned again, looking up at Wren with an intense stare. "I will not abandon my friend. She was taken from me and I will save her. And I will defeat anyone who stands in my way."

Wren looked down at Grey, studying him from head to toe. "Fine, I'll fight you."

With a bright flash a longsword appeared in Grey's hands. He swung the blade with ease in the air before getting into his battle stance. "If you have a weapon, draw it."

Wren sighed a bit, shaking his head. "I should be getting paid for this..." he mumbled.

Grey thrust forward with his sword, forcing Wren off the rock they both stood on. The murky water around them splashed about as Grey advanced further towards Wren, swinging his sword in a huge horizontal arc.

Feeling more annoyed over the fact that his shoes just got muddy than being attacked by Grey, Wren just barely dodged the deadly blade and reached out for his opponent, snagging a hold of his right shoulder. Grey let out a cry in pain as he felt the vice-like grip crumple his armor like tin-foil. The sharp fingernails were starting to dig into his flesh as he held up his other hand against Wren's face, trying to force the larger man off him, but to no avail.

"L-let. Me. Go!" his left hand started to glow and fired off a blast of light, causing Wren to lose his grip, sending him flying backwards.

Wren hit a tree and fell down in the stinking water. Coughing, he stood up again only to see Grey running towards him, his sword ready to strike. The young man thrust his sword forward and was inches away from burying his sword deep into his opponent's shoulder, but Wren took a swift sidestep, meeting Grey's body with a hard kick. He could feel Grey's chest cave in against his legs, the soft sound of ribs cracking just before he sent Grey flying over the treetops due to the sheer force of the blow.

"...I guess I should go scrape him off the trees." Wren mumbled to himself.

Still having the wind knocked out of him, Grey managed to turn around in the air, covering his face and body with his arms to defend against the harsh whipping of the branches and shrubs. As he hit the water, his body skipped like a stone, giving him opportunity to flip over and land on his feet.

Grey coughed as he put his left hand over his mid-section feeling his bruised body. Standing up with the help of his sword in the knee-deep water he looked in the direction he just came from, trying to see if his opponent had followed him.

There was no sight of Wren yet, this was good. There were quite many trees in this area of the marshes and they would serve him well.

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This was the place of impact, Wren was sure of it. It was a small 'glade' in the marshes and the water looked like it was a little clearer. He saw two skid marks dug deep into the earth under the surface. Apparently the blonde young man had landed on his feet after all.

Also; he was hiding.

Wren was surprised. A blow like that would have killed a normal man with ease and here was someone who had not only survived, but also having enough strength left to get up and hide, seemingly without a trace.

He listened to the sounds around him, but once again the marshes were almost dead-silent.

"...Grey?" he called out, not really expecting a reply.

"I'm over here."

Wren quickly spun around. He saw Grey standing next to one of the trees, his left hand resting on the giant trunk. To his surprise, the young man didn't look like he was injured at all, or perhaps he was just hiding it. "Congratulations on surviving that. Not many---" he was cut short as Grey struck the base of the tree hard with his sword. The leaves above rustled and the trunk started to pop and crack as it slowly started to fall to the ground and Wren was standing in path.

Wren quirked a brow, first looking up at the tree and then at Grey who was sporting a smug smile. "You realize this tree is falling slower than a sloth on valium, right? There's no chance it will hit me."

"It will speed up. Like me." He closed his eyes, concentrating. Something seemed to be glowing under his jacket, just over his heart. As he opened his eyes, Grey grabbed his sword in both hands and dashed towards Wren at blinding speed, cutting a gash into Wren's stomach as he passed him.

Wren didn't even notice it until he felt a sharp pain on his stomach. He looked down and saw his shirt cut open, red blood starting to pour out from the wound.

"Y-you little fuck!" he exclaimed, quickly scanning the surroundings to see where Grey went.

There he was, next to another tree, dealing a quick blow to it as well before darting back towards Wren again this time cutting his left leg.

Wren growled at Grey as he watched him strike another tree. He cocked his left fist back attempting to punch the young warrior as he passed, but he hit nothing but air and got a huge gash on his forearm as thanks.

Grey stopped in his tracks as he stood at the edge of the glade, his yellow scarf fluttering in the wind as he turned towards Wren, lifting his fingers to give him a little wave.

Wren looked up and saw the tree coming crashing down on top of him. He threw himself to the side, just barely dodging it as the large tree sent water and mud splashing across the glade.

Wren rolled over on his back, only to see the next tree toppling down over him. He clenched his fist and hit the tree with full force, the trunk exploding into a cloud of water, splinters and blood.

Blood that was gushing out from his now cracked knuckles. He turned over again, standing on all fours, looking at Grey. “Just wait until I get my hands on you, you little piece of---“

The last tree fell down, hitting Wren right in the head and dunking his head under the water. This was the opening Grey had waited for. He rushed up to Wren burying his blade into the larger man’s right shoulder, pressing down his body with his foot. A muffled scream could be heard as a few bubbles of air made their way up.

“Do you yield?!” Grey yelled out as he held on to his sword with both hands.

The response came quickly, with his left hand Wren grabbed one of the fallen trunks and swung it around like an overgrown club. The trunk grazed Grey who was forced to move back, pulling out the sword roughly as he flipped backwards to the edge of the glade again.

The ground trembled as Wren shoved the trunk down into the water, using it as a crutch to help him stand, he wiped the muddy water off his face, his rainbow eyes piercing through the muddy locks of hair, staring straight at Grey.

“I... will NEVER yield to ANYONE!” Wren screamed out as he picked up the trunk once again.

Wielding it like a spear he sent it flying at Grey, who with great effort, actually managed to deflect the huge trunk with his sword and send it crashing into the watery ground instead. Wren stumbled forward a bit, pressing his left hand on his fresh through-and-through wound. He removed his hand, looking at the red essence trickling down his dirty hand.

When he looked up, he noticed that Grey was gone, again. He ran his fingers through his hair, combing it back as he spat out some of the muddy water.

“Taste like fucking shit...” he grumbled as he patted the back of his head gently, feeling the small bump the tree had made.

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Grey panted heavily as he leaned back against a big rock. He didn’t think Wren had managed to follow him. Comparing the time it took for Wren to reach Grey last time, he figured he had a minute or three before the brute caught up. Grey removed his yellow scarf and unbuttoned his shirt. Holding the cloth to the side, he looked down on to himself. A strange heart-shaped tattoo was engraved on the left side of his chest. Dark tendrils were emanating from the tattoo, reaching across his chest to the other side and down on to his stomach.

“Damn...” Grey sighed as he quickly buttoned up again, pulling up his left sleeve to his elbow, the tendrils were visible there as well. He licked his lips, taking a few deep breaths as he attempted to calm his racing heart.

He rolled down his sleeve and undid the straps on his spaulders that Wren had damaged earlier. He figured it didn’t matter if he had them or not right now. Even though they had been smudged and dirtied they could still give his position away if he wasn’t careful and if Wren managed to get his hands on him, they wouldn’t provide protection anyway.

The water was deeper here, reaching well over his knees, but the trees were fewer, which meant he couldn’t really climb up onto the rock either or he’ll just be a sitting duck. He let his spaulders carefully go, making sure they didn’t splash as they hit the water. Watching them slowly sink to the bottom he also took off his scarf, wrapping it around his right arm instead.

“There... now he can't at least strangle me with it.” He thought.

Grey slowly peeked out from behind the rock towards the direction he had run from. No sign yet that anyone were following him, but something didn't feel right. He looked up a little higher, over the treetops.

That's when he saw it. A huge rock, it was flying straight towards him. Grey grabbed his sword quickly and started running to get out of the way, but he stumbled on some underwater roots. The rock crashed down a few feet behind him with a giant splash, the waves created by the boulder caused him to lose his footing as he struggled to get back up on his feet. Gasping for air, he got his head above the water and spun around, wiping the water away from his eyes.

Wren looked straight back at Grey. He was crouching on the rock that just had come flying. He leaped forward, ready to tackle Grey down, but as he was about to hit him a white, shimmering shield appeared around the young man, knocking Wren back.

Grey held a firm grip around his sword, watching Wren carefully as they circled each other. He had to hurry, keeping the shield up drained him.

“You know Bubble-boy, I could be home banging the shit out of Sunnie right now, but instead I'm stuck in this stupid tournament. So attack me already so we can finish this!” he said waving his hands for Grey to come at him.

“You don't think I would rather be home as well? But I have to win!” Grey gritted his teeth as he moved forward and swung his blade, the sword passing right through the shield as if it wasn't even there.

Wren caught the blade in-between his hands, twisting it sideways right out of Grey's hands. As the blade left his hands however, it disappeared. Wren didn't think twice about it, he clenched his fist, hitting the shield as hard as he could. The sound of the impact echoed through the marshes, the shield itself flickered and dissipated, leaving Grey open as the surge of energy leaving caused him to scream out.

The larger man grabbed a hold of Grey's lithe frame and slammed him into the rock. Wren grabbed Grey by the throat and arm, pinning him up against the rock. Grey gasped for air, he kicked his opponent over and over, but he seemed unyielding.

Grey felt more and more desperate, he had to get away. His body was so tired, but he couldn't give up yet. Not yet, he had to push himself a little more.

Just a little more.

Grey's eyes suddenly turned bright red as he screamed out. He grabbed Wren's arm and to his opponents surprise actually managing to pry it away from his throat. Wren narrowed his eyes as Grey's skin started to darken, turning pitch black, the darkness spreading so far it even blackened his hair. He pushed Wren backwards through the water, letting him go before pouncing after him.

The two tumbled down into the water. Grey's ferocious behavior fueled Wren's own savage urges and the two kept tearing into each other like rabid beasts, clawing and biting, snarling and growling in each other's faces. As they wrestled, the dark water around them started turning red due to their spilled blood.

Despite Grey's newfound powers, he had a hard time getting the upper hand as Wren was both much bigger and even stronger than him. Wren had grabbed Grey in a chokehold from behind. He could feel the sharp nails digging into his neck as the grip around his trachea tightened. Grey held a tight grip around Wren's arm with one hand while he swung his fist upwards, over his own head, punching Wren right in the face. The force was enough to shatter stone, but it didn't look like it had much effect on Wren's physical being, however, Grey got the result he wanted. He had forced Wren to let go.

He sprung from the water, bouncing off one of the large rocks as he catapulted himself straight back at Wren, kicking him hard square in the chest. Wren was tossed back several yards, but flipped around in the air and landed on his feet. He saw Grey coming towards him, like a black shadow. He was running so fast he was actually skipping on the water surface. Wren smirked as he planted his feet in the muddy ground, preparing for impact.

Grey hit Wren head on, tackling him with full force. Wren was pushed back, his feet burrowing deeper into the ground, but he managed to keep standing. Grey had latched on to him like a snake, his arms and legs squeezing around his body, pressing the air out of his lungs.

Wren pushed his right hand up against Grey's chin, attempting to pry him off. But Grey took Wren's hand with his, biting down hard on it, almost all the way down to the bone. Wren screamed as he grabbed Grey's face with his other hand, digging his thumb into his eye.

Grey howled in pain as he let Wren go, holding on to his arm with both hands. As he pulled away a cascade of blood shot out from the hole where his eye once was. Wren snagged a hold of Grey's back head with his damaged hand. He thrust forward, slamming Grey's face into the rock repeatedly, staining it red as the large boulder started to crack.

Grey's body had gone limp in Wren's arms, the blackness was slowly receding as well. Wren could see his blonde strands in his hair. Letting out a sigh of relief, Wren held his hand over the water, slowly something could be seen rising towards the surface. He looked down and picked up the once discarded spaulders, then he picked up Grey's body, cradling it in his arms and went back deeper into the marshes.

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After removing Grey's coat and shirt, Wren put Grey down to rest on the big branch he once rested upon himself. The boy was still alive, his breathing stable. Wren put his left hand over Grey's destroyed eye, closing his own as he concentrated.

"I haven't done this in ages..." he thought.

His hand started to glow with a warm light. Wren grimaced as he could feel the strain on his body, but it was working... slowly.

"Grrh! FUCK!!" he screamed out as the light died out. Wren fell backwards, panting heavily. With great effort he pulled himself up to a sitting position, looking at Grey.

The eye was still missing, but the wound had started to close. Hopefully he had done it right at least. He grabbed his backpack and took out the first aid kit that Sita had given him. He held it in his hands for a few minutes, thinking back to his friends before opening it.

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Grey could feel the warm rays of the sun on his face, he squirmed a bit before opening his eyes. Eyes... he thought about that for a few seconds before reaching up, feeling his face. It was unbroken and to his surprise, he could actually see with both his eyes.

He sat up carefully, his body was still aching badly. Grey looked down on himself, he was half naked he noticed. As he looked up he saw a grassy field and next to him; a campfire, waiting to be lit.

“How did I get here...?” he mumbled to himself as he ran his fingers over the bandages on his right shoulder.

“Oh, you’re awake. I guess that means I have to cook this...”

A dead rabbit was dropped down right beside Grey, he jolted a bit and looked up seeing Wren standing next to him, looking back down at him. He seemed completely unharmed, Grey thought and even his clothes were mended.

“You...!”

“Don’t think about attacking me, I’m way better off than you are. You’ve been knocked out for more than a week. Wouldn’t even be a descent fight.” Wren said as he plopped down on the ground a few feet away from Grey. “Besides, I can use this as an excuse to kill the rest I meet. I did my good deed of the year.”

Wren held up his right hand, a small fireball forming in his palm. He tossed it down at the campfire that started burning in an instant. He then grabbed the rabbit, looking to Grey. “Are you hungry?”

As if on cue, Grey’s stomach replied with a growling sound. Grey’s face turned a little red from embarrassment, looking down on the ground with a nod. Wren chuckled lightly as he took out his hunting knife from his backpack and proceeded to skin the small prey. Grey watched him work and was honestly surprised at how fast and easy Wren made it seem.

Looking around Grey saw his clothes and armor laying a few feet behind him. He leaned sideways to reach his spaulders, giving of a grunting noise as he could feel the strain on his ribs.

“I didn’t bother to fix your armor.” Wren said as he finished preparing the meat, putting half of it up on a stick, handing it to Grey. “You cook your own shit.”

Grey took the stick as he placed his spaulders in his lap. He held the meat over the fire, sighing heavily. “Why did you do this?” Grey asked.

“What? Crumpled your armor? If you’ve forgotten, you were the one who attacked me first.” Wren muttered as he bit down on the raw skinned head of the rabbit, the bones crunching loudly.

Grey stared at Wren, a disgusted look on his face. “No! I meant this!” he gestured to his injured body and the bandages that had been placed on it.

“Oh.” Wren quickly gobbled down the head, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. “I like you, kid. You did well and it would be a shame to see you die.”

“Stop... stop calling me kid, I’m not a kid. I’m nineteen.” Grey said shaking his head.

“Still a kid.” Wren smirked as he slurped down a few more pieces of raw meat and stood up, dusting off his pants.

“How come your clothes are all mended and fixed up? Or do you simply own several setups of the same outfit?”

Wren rolled his eyes at that. “Of course I don’t. Any idea how lame that is?” he sneered. “I fixed them with magic. Like the only good way to use magic anyway if you ask me.”

“Can’t you do it to mine too?” Grey asked, holding up his spaulders to Wren.

He nodded. “I could. But I won’t.” Wren grinned. “You gotta have something to do while I go and save my future wife.”

“Kyrie!” Grey exclaimed, as he suddenly seemed to remember why he was here in the first place.

With a flash the blade appeared in his hand again as he tried to stand up, but Wren grabbed his head and pushed him down on the ground again. He gave Grey’s sword wielding hand a kick, hard enough to force the blade out of Grey’s hands.

“I told you; don’t even think about attacking. You’re not well enough yet.”

He let Grey go and walked over to his backpack, picking it up and flinging it over his shoulder.

“If I find her, I’ll try and help her. You have my word.”

Grey sighed heavily, he knew Wren was right. “...good luck, I guess.”

Wren shrugged a bit as he looked down at Grey. “Don’t die now. Or I would have wasted all that energy for nothing, recovering your eye. And the fact that I almost used all the bandages I had wrapping your scrawny ass up.”

Grey nodded somberly as he looked a little closer at the meat he was cooking, it was slightly burnt.

Wren turned around and started walking away. He was glad he was finally out of those horrible marshes and he was also curious as to what sort of other contestants there were.

But he was sure that question would be answered shortly.