

Shard Warriors – Vol.1

Chapter 4

Halen grunted, opened his truck's door and stepped out into the blistering heat. All around him, dried earth. No sign of plant life, no hint of anything alive at all save for Halen himself.

The ground was too rocky to continue driving, but he wasn't *too* far off from where the coordinates led. Just a couple minutes on foot, and he'd get there.

'Where it all began'.

The crater.

Mother had been searching for this place for years. Had sent countless drones out in search of it, complied satellite photos and images in the hopes of discovering the location. If Red's story was to be believed – that the old man had brought him to the crater, made him memorise the coordinates – then Halen was about to set foot in a very special place.

Following in his grandfather's footsteps.

He grabbed the cool-box from the truck's passenger seat, shut the truck door, began hiking over the rough terrain.

Within minutes, he was drenched in sweat.

A desert. Why, of all places, did it have to be a desert?

He stopped, opened up the cool-box and plucked out an ice-cold can of soda. Continued on, drinking and thinking and constantly checking his coordinates on a special handheld device Mother had sent him.

Minutes ticked by. Agonising, hateful minutes.

And then he was there, standing on a rocky ridge overlooking a huge, camouflaged tarpaulin sheet. A fifty foot square, anchored to the ground with metal hooks every few feet. The same dead shades of yellow and brown as the rest of the surroundings, with a thin layer of sand and dirt atop it.

From above, it'd look just like the rest of the desert.

No wonder Mother hadn't been able to find this place.

Carefully, Halen descended the rocky ridge. The last thing he needed was to trip and fall and break his neck. His heart thudded in his chest as he reached the edge of the tarpaulin sheet, mind racing with the possibilities.

The old man wouldn't be here. He was certain of that. Living in an empty, desolate desert with no food or water? No, the old bastard wouldn't be here. But *something* must be.

Why else would he force his grandson to remember the coordinates? Why else would he leave that note directing The Five here?

Halen pulled out his phone, turned its flash-light on, climbed under the tarpaulin sheet.

As expected, the ground underneath was shaped like a bowl. A crater.

Halen crept down the slope, searching the crater for anything unusual. As far as he could see, there were no doors to be unlocked, no hatches or entryways to secret bases. Just curved, charred earth.

At the lowest point, the very heart of the crater, Halen paused.

He sighed, knowing what he had to do.

Reaching into his pocket, he whipped out the trowel he'd brought for this very eventuality. There was a proper shovel in his truck, but the idea of trekking back to get it was anything but appealing. Hopefully, the trowel would be enough.

He began digging.

A small hole at the heart of the crater.

Thankfully, he only got a few inches deep before his trowel hit something metal. A bit more work later, and a metal foot locker was revealed.

A chest made from the same strange, indestructible metal as the Power Belts, with five unlit lights on its roof and a simple keyhole in front. Sealed shut, remarkably clean for something that'd been buried underground for who knew how long.

Halen pulled it out of the hole, surprised at how light the metal chest was. He carried it out of the crater, into the bright sunlight beyond, dumped it on the ground.

Without stopping to breathe, he pulled a key out of his pocket.

The key he'd found in the old man's lockbox.

He slid it into the lock, smiled at the perfect fit. Heart racing, he made to turn the key.

The metal chest beeped at him, the five lights on top flashing all at once.

Red, Green, Yellow, Pink, Blue.

He tried turning the key again.

Another beep.

The five lights flashed the respective colours.

And the chest remained locked.

"Son of a bitch," Halen sighed. "Why can things never just be easy for once? Why'd you have to make this so complicated?"

"Jason!" Jennifer gasped, hands curled into fists, ass red from Halen's spanking. "Fuck!"

He slammed into her again, hand on the back of her neck.

"I'm close," the girl moaned, bouncing her ass backwards to meet his every thrust. "Harder, Jason. Faster!"

Halen slapped her ass again, grinning at the sight of her.

In The Five's secret hideout. The meeting room. Her bent over the round, metal table as Halen took her from behind. Naked save for the metal belt she wore with its green front disk.

"Sir," Halen grunted, chest aching as he used his Purple Shard's power. "Call me *sir*, slut."

"I'm cumming, sir," Jennifer cried out. "I'm cumming!"

As her cunt convulsed around his cock, Halen unloaded inside the Green's hole. Pumped her full of cum, one burst after another.

He slumped over her, his black t-shirt soaking up the sweat from Jennifer's drenched back. His hands reached around her chest, gave her tits a heavy squeeze. For her part, all Jennifer Morose could do was remain in place, panting heavily.

In front of them was the locked crate with its five unlit lights.

He'd thought, perhaps, that bringing it here would allow him to unlock it. The meeting place of The Five. But no luck. When he'd slid the key in the lock and tried to turn it, that same denying beep and the flashing lights.

It wasn't a location that'd unlock the chest. It was something else.

As Halen was taking a step back, pulling up his trousers and putting his cunt-soaked cock away, he heard something. A door opening nearby. Someone coming.

Jennifer heard it to.

Her fatigue vanished as she shot away from the mess on the table, her eyes darting towards the pile of clothes she didn't have time to put on.

As far as she was aware, she'd just been fucked by her brother. Was about to get caught in the act by whoever was entering the headquarters. Her face was bright red, body soaked, a line of cum trickling down her leg. Naked, save for the Power Belt.

The girl thought fast, reaching down to touch her Belt's green disk just as the meeting room's door was about to open.

"Partial Morp," Jennifer Morose whispered.

Green and white shot out from under the belt, wrapping itself around Jennifer like a second skin. In an instant, she was wearing white gloves and boots, had Green's suit –

every part of her covered save her head - no helmet.

Halen gathered his strength, focused on the warmth in his chest, his hidden power.

When the door opened, and a man wearing a blue polo-shirt walked in, Halen blasted him with the Purple Shard's power – twisted his mind to see Jason Morose instead of Halen himself.

He staggered, saw the Blue's eyes widen.

Brian Xander. An anomaly within The Five. Not particularly fit or athletic, with poor enough vision that he required glasses at all times. Nerdy as opposed to strong. He wasn't related in the same way the other members of The Five were; Red and Green were siblings, Yellow was their cousin, and Pink was a life-long neighbour and friend-turned-lover. Brian Xander, though, only met the others a few weeks prior to The Five first donning their Belts together – according to Mother's research.

How did he fit into the equation?

Halen forced himself to stand up straight, stare at the Blue who was, in turn, staring in shock at him.

"Jason?" Brian said, eyes flicking for a moment to Jenny. "You're back?"

Halen opened his mouth to speak, but something caught his eye – demanded his full attention.

The chest on the table. One of the lights had lit up.

Green.

"And Jenny," Brian continued, "are you doing okay? Your face is kinda red. Are you?"

"Just exercising," Jennifer said quickly, short of breath. "Working out in the training room. Practising."

Why had the green light activated?

"Jennifer," Halen said, eyes not moving from the locked chest. "Could you leave us? Grab your clothes and head out of headquarters. There's something I have to talk to Blue about."

"Uh," Jennifer blushed. "Sure thing..."

She seemed happy enough for an excuse to get out of the room, snatching up her clothes and practically running to the exit. The further she got away from the chest, the dimmer the Green light became until it turned off completely.

Curious. Five lights. Each one the same colour as a member of The Five. The corresponding light turning on when Jenny had morphed into Green.

Halen's eyes snapped up to Brian.

"Jason?" Brian said, concern lacing his voice. "Are you okay buddy? You look kinda intense right now."

"Morph," Halen commanded him, chest aching as he used his Shard's power again. "Transform into Blue."

Brian raised an eyebrow. He didn't say anything, just quickly stripped out of his polo-shirt and khaki pants. He kept his underwear on, but removed his glasses. Still confused, he reached down and touched the blue disk on his Power Belt.

"Full Morph," he stated loud and clear.

And, a moment later, the Blue stood before Halen.

Muscles enhanced by the suit, eyesight enhanced by the helmet. Stronger than any normal man could hope to be, faster than physics should allow, with regenerative abilities that made him all but indestructible.

Halen glanced at the locked chest on The Five's meeting table.

Sure enough, the blue light was bright and alive.

Interesting.

"Jason?" The Blue said, voice deeper and more powerful than it'd been moments before. "What's going on?"

Halen shook his head, turned to the Blue.

"Sit down," he said, circling around the table and hopping up to sit on it next to Blue's chair. "There's something I want to talk to you about."

The box and its lights could wait.

Right now, Halen had an opportunity he might not get again.

Of The Five, only the Blue had a chance to be saved.

Red and Green and Yellow? Their family bonds would prevent them from switching sides. They would no more turn on their grandfather than Halen would betray his own family. And Pink was so enamoured with Red that she'd follow him anywhere – even to the defeat and doom that was looming over them.

The Blue, though? His ties to The Five were limited at best.

If any of them could be convinced to see reason, it was him.

"What do you know about Malcolm Morose?" Halen asked when Blue took his seat. "And about how all this began?"

"All of it," Brian Xander said. "I remember everything your grandfather told us. Every word."

"Tell me," Halen commanded.

"A very special meteor fell from the sky one night," Brian said, leaning back in his chair. "Observed by a genius scientist named Norman Venitus and his research assistant, Robert Finnegan. When the two went to go examine the fallen meteorite, they discovered strange gemstones embedded in it. Over a dozen, each one a different colour."

That much was true. Halen's grandfather and his soon-to-be murderer had found the meteorite together. The source of the Gemshards.

"The pair of them took the meteorite to Norman's private lab and pried the Shards out of it. It didn't take them long to discover that applying an electrical current to the Shards causes them to grow and multiply. And, along with that discovery, they began to learn what the Shards were truly capable of."

Halen crossed his arms, listened.

"So far," Brian said, head hidden by the Blue's helmet, "we've only encountered three types of Shard. Orange, Yellow, and Green. Strength, Speed, and Recovery. But there are so many other colours we haven't come across yet. Apparently, Red Shards give a person pyrokinesis and Blue Shards give hydrokinesis. Who knows what the other colours might be capable of."

Halen forced himself to keep from smirking.

He knew what the other Shards could do. He'd helped Mother with more than a few of *those* experiments.

"Anyway. In order to learn more about the Gemshards, Norman Venitus began abducting people to use as test subjects. He went mad with power, became obsessed with harnessing all the powers of the different Shards to become a god. And so Robert Finnegan confronted him."

Mad with power? Obsessed with becoming a god?

What was *this* bullshit?

Halen's grandfather had been a scientist. The only thing he'd been 'obsessed' with was *learning*. Advancing humanity's understanding of the universe.

So what if he'd snatched a few homeless bums off the streets to experiment on? In the end, his discoveries would've changed the world.

Would have, if not for his assistant's greed.

"During the confrontation, a fire broke out," Brian shrugged. "Norman Venitus fell victim to the blaze, as did the rest of the lab. Robert Finnegan managed to save a good portion of their research from the fires, but not any of the Shards in the lab. It was assumed that all the Gemshards were destroyed in the ensuing inferno."

Victim of the *blaze*? *Save* the research?

No. Lies.

Robert Finnegan turned on Halen's grandfather, murdered him in cold blood and started the fire to hide his crimes. He *stole* the research and the Shardless meteorite.

It wasn't fire that killed Halen's grandfather. Unless fire was suddenly capable of bludgeoning a man to death with a blunt object, cracking his ribs and shattering his skull. The autopsy reports all agreed; Norman Venitus died *before* the fire had broken out. He'd been *murdered*.

"Robert Finnegan changed his name to Malcolm Morose, moved away and started a whole new life."

Ran away. Changed his name to protect himself.

"And then, years later, Day Zero happened. Shard Mutants attacked the city, a dozen of them. Killed over two hundred people before the military was forced to drop bombs to stop them. Your grandfather knew what no-one else did, knew what the Shard Mutants actually were. It didn't take him long to figure out that some of the Shards must have survived the flames, and that the daughter of Norman Venitus had grown up and was following in her father's footsteps. Kidnapping people and experimenting on them - turning them into monsters."

It was a necessary evil.

One that wouldn't be necessary at all, if Malcolm Morose hadn't murdered Halen's grandfather and stolen his research.

All the orphans and homeless bums and lost men and women? It was all on the old man. If he hadn't taken Halen's birthright, Mother's birthright, none of the experiments would be needed. They'd already have all the knowledge they required.

"Malcolm Morose refined metal from the original meteorite he possessed, used it to make the first Morph Belt and became The Grey. He moved back here and began fighting against Shard Mutants that the Venitus Corporation has been unleashing on the city ever since."

Nice of the Blue to *conveniently* avoid the fact that Malcolm Morose used *stolen* research to create the Belts.

Hypocrites.

Shunning Halen's grandfather for the scarifies he'd been forced to make, then turning around and using that very research to terrorise his descendants.

As long as The Grey and The Five were around, a thorn in Mother's side, she'd never be able to unlock the Gemshards' full potential. The wannabe 'heroes' had to go. Their actions against Mother, against Halen's family, couldn't be forgiven.

"The rest," Brian Xander said, "as they say, is history."

History. Just like The Five would soon be.

Halen shook his head, coming to a decision.

He'd been thinking of recruiting the Blue – saving this silly nerd from the fate awaiting all Mother's enemies. But it was too late for that. Brian Xander had bought into the old man's lies. There was no saving him, or any of them. Not any more.

"De-morph," Halen commanded Blue, pushing himself off The Five's meeting table. His chest throbbed happily as the nerd obeyed his order. "And go work out or something, put some meat on your bones. You look pathetic."

Brian Xander flinched, real pain in his eyes.

Halen ignored him, turned to the metal chest. Sure enough, the blue light on it had turned off.

He picked the box up off the table, strode out of the meeting room.

"Whatever's inside," Halen said, pacing back and forth in Jason's apartment, "it's important. Why else would it need all five of them to be morphed in order to open?"

"You don't know that," Mother said, the sound of her heels clacking on tile flooring in the background of the call. "You're making assumptions."

"I'm right," Halen told her. "I can feel it."

"Even if you are," Mother's voice cut in, "what do you propose I do about it? Release Jason Morose, give him his Belt back so he can be the Red again?"

To open the chest, he needed all of The Five to be morphed nearby. That included Red. Which meant yes, Jason Morose would need his Morph Belt back. No-one else could wear it, after all. But to just let him go? After all the effort put in to breaking his will, snapping his mind?

"We need The Five in one place," Halen smiled. "And we need them in their suits, so they have to be fighting. But who ever said they have to be fighting Shard Monsters? Why not have them fighting each other instead?"

"The Purple Shard is powerful," Mother said through his phone speakers, the sound of clacking coming to a halt. "But that power is far from absolute. You know our weakness, Halen. We only have one shot. One chance."

The Achilles Heel of the Purple Shard; it'd only work on someone who wasn't aware they were being manipulated. The moment they became aware that something was affecting their mind - controlling them - its influence over them ended.

If – or, more accurately, when – The Five became aware that their minds were being altered, they'd become near-immune to the Purple Shard's powers. It was why Jason Morose had required so much time and torture before giving up the secrets he had; his mother's Purple Shard had lost its effect on him the moment he'd worked out what was happening.

"It'll be worth it," Halen promised.

Whatever was in that chest, it'd change everything. Halen could *feel* it.

"Halen-"

"Trust me, Mother," Halen said. "I have a plan."