

Shard Warriors – Vol.2

Chapter 5

Halen

He stared at the screen with more than a little confusion.

Sure, Halen had been expecting this. Or, at least, something *like* this. Ever since Jason had started rebuilding his team of wannabe heroes, Halen had known a confrontation was coming. But... Not like *this*.

On the tablet screen was Jason Morose, suited up as the Red.

Alone.

The man was stomping around Halen's mansion, kicking open doors and screaming Halen's name like a lunatic. The Red Suit, Halen noticed, was cracked and strained.

Had Jason been in a fight?

Why was he here alone?

And why *now* of all times?

In the early hours of the morning, no warning or plan that Halen could discern. After a quick check up, looking at the feeds from hidden cameras set up months ago, Halen saw the other Shard Warriors sleeping soundly. Oblivious to what was going on.

But what was going on?

"Ah well," he sighed, pushing himself out of bed.

If Jason wanted to do this *now*, so be it. This was a showdown that should've happened months ago. Why Jason hadn't come for him back then, or why he'd chosen to put the team back together only to come at Halen alone now, Halen didn't know. But the Red had made a massive mistake.

Coming at Halen in that damaged, strained Suit?

Jason was about to sorely regret that.

Jason

"Halen!"

He kicked open another door, scanned the room beyond. An empty sound-recording studio. Why in the *fuck* did Halen Venitus have a personal sound-recording studio?! Like the private theatre before it, and the art studio before that, the room looked too clean to see frequent – or even *infrequent* - use.

"Show yourself! Halen!"

Fucking rich people with their stupidly huge, completely unnecessary mansions. All these rooms filled with bullshit. Where the *fuck* was he?!

"I'm gonna find you!" He roared. "I'm gonna fucking kill you!"

"That's not very nice," a voice said over a speaker above Jason's head. He glanced up, saw a security camera pointed at him. "And here I thought you were meant to be the 'hero'."

"I know it was you, fucker," Jason growled at the camera. "I know what you've been doing. Come out now, and I'll make it quick. Keep hiding and-"

"What is it you think you know, exactly?" Halen's voice said from the camera, sounding amused. Unafraid. "That I've been keeping an eye on Maya and her 'online activities'. Or that I've been tracking your sister and all the guys she's fucked over the last few months? Trust me, that's one long list... If you're here about Brian; that ain't on me, man. I was against giving him a job. My mother though... She was *insistent* about it. Take it up with her."

Brian? What job?

Jason shook his head. He couldn't allow himself to be distracted. Not here, in the serpent's lair.

"The chapel," Jason snarled. "The priest. I *know*, fucker."

There was a pause. An awkward silence in which Jason stood in the darkness, staring at an unmoving camera. His heart thundered as his rage boiled.

Finally, Halen spoke again.

"What chapel?" The rat's voice sounded confused. Then he burst out laughing. "Wait, is *that* why you're so beat up? Did you get your ass handed to you by a *priest*?"

Jason ignored the cackling. Turned and stomped to the next door, kicked it open, checked inside.

Empty.

"I'll be down in a minute," Halen's voice said above him as he moved to the next door. "Head back to the entryhall and wait for me there. Should be enough space for your 'dramatic showdown'. Not that it'll be very dramatic..."

He hesitated. Glancing from the security camera to the corridor.

Two lines of open doorways, broken doorframes and splintered doors. A corridor that'd lead all the way back to the mansion's entrance. And, behind him, unexplored rooms. Intact doors. Potentially, Halen himself.

If he went to the entryway and waited, it'd be giving the rat bastard a chance to escape into the night.

But what choice did he have?

This mansion had multiple wings, countless rooms and an infinite number of dark corners to hide in. If Halen didn't want to be found, how likely was it that Jason would be able to?

Grunting, glaring, he marched back the way he'd come.

Towards the mansion's entryway.

He'd give the fucker five minutes to show.

And, if he didn't, Jason would burn this stupid mansion to the fucking ground.

The Red Shard in his chest flared with anticipation.

The massive entryhall was dominated by huge, curving, twin staircases. Between the staircases, a marble statue. Either side of them, doorways that led to different wings of the mansion.

Ostentatious and unnecessary. Ugly in its grandeur.

Jason paced at the foot of the staircases, in front of the marble statue of some Greek god. Counting down the seconds before he unleashed the Red Shard's power. If Halen didn't show up soon, didn't face Jason like a man, he could burn along with the rest of the mansion.

The Red Shard whispered in his mind.

It was ironic, wasn't it? Halen and his mother had forced this Red Shard upon him, warped his brain and played with his thoughts like he was a toy. Now, he was going to use that very same Shard to incinerate their home.

He almost *wanted* Halen to stay away.

An excuse to use the Red Shard? Cave into its unending demands to be unleashed? Jason was practically *grinning* at the thought.

But, when he heard the footsteps above, a greater eagerness swelled inside his chest. A thrill that'd been pushed down and suppressed for far too long. Finally. *Finally*, he was going to confront the bastard that'd ruined everything. The son of a bitch that'd fucked with Maya's mind and defiled his sister.

Imminent vengeance.

It was a high that no drug could hope to compare with.

Halen Venitus appeared at the top of a staircase. Black hair messy and unkempt, clad in a loose black robe that was open at the chest and legs – only the man's waist was concealed by the black robe. He was rubbing his eye lazily, a cocky smile tugging at his lips.

"Next time you stop by for a playdate," the rat-bastard yawned, "could you do it at a more reasonable time, please? I don't like being woken up by-"

Jason launched himself at Halen.

He leapt up the flight of stairs like it was nothing, soared above the now wide-eyed Halen. A surge of glee bursting in his chest at the shock and surprise on Halen's face.

Halen spun on the spot, hopped backwards just as Jason's fist punched through the air where the rat's face had been a split second before. A punch with enough force behind it that it would've slammed right through the man's frail skull.

As he was pulling his hand back for another swing, eager to finish this immediately, Halen threw something at him.

The rat's black robe flew flimsily at Jason's head, was swatted aside with barely a thought. But the action took valuable milliseconds. Had Jason seen something flashing on Halen's waist? He didn't have time to think or register.

"Full Morph!" Halen Venitus shouted.

But why would he...?

Black and white scales spread over Halen's naked body, covering his arms and legs in a heartbeat. A black and white helmet formed over Halen's head, a colourless mirror of the one Jason was currently wearing.

Jason froze.

It wasn't possible. It *couldn't* be.

There were only six Belts. Red, Blue, Green, Yellow, Pink, and Grey. Six. He'd never seen a *Black* Belt before. Gramps had never told him about it.

It... It couldn't be real. Jason was hallucinating. Dreaming. He was-

Halen punched Jason's head.

The next thing Jason was aware of was the ceiling moving above him as he flew backwards. Down. An instant later, his back smashed into the ground at the bottom of the staircase, slid across the floor several feet.

It wasn't possible.

Halen was atop him a moment later, his fresh Black Suit almost identical to Jason's worn-out Red.

It *couldn't* be possible.

The man rained punches down on Jason, fist slamming into Jason's head and chest – widening the cracks that'd already been there, creating new ones. Any second now, Jason's Red Suit would give out completely.

How?

"Shouldn't have come here alone, Jason," Halen taunted, voice distorted by his helmet. "With your Suit already damaged, no less. It's like you *wanted* to die."

No.

Jason's helmet shattered completely.

Halen raised his fist one last time.

No!

Burn him!

Jason roared.

And unleashed the full force of his Red Shard.

He stumbled away from the inferno. Skin bruised, hair scorched, covered in ash, naked save for the Morph Belt around his waist.

Halen. Where was Halen?

He didn't have the energy to look around. Didn't have it in him to care.

Every ounce of willpower he had left went into taking the next step, the one after that. Hobbling away from the burning mansion, away from Halen, away from *everything*.

He'd failed. Failed.

Failed...

Halen had a Belt. Somehow, the bastard had bonded a Morph Belt.

The Black Belt.

"Shit," Jason croaked out, voice raw.

He climbed over a wall, limped his way down an empty street as sirens sounded in the distance behind him.

Halen was The Black. A seventh Shard Warrior.

How was it possible?

Gramps. He must've made more Belts. No way did the Venitus Institute have access to the metal...

Were there *more* Belts? Did *Halen* have others?

"Fuck," Jason mumbled.

He didn't stop. Kept moving forward. One foot after the other.

By the time he arrived home, the sky was beginning to brighten. Dawn coming, sunrise an hour away. His feet were bloody from the long, bare-footed walk. His muscles ached, his head throbbed. Even his emotions were exhausted beyond the point of usefulness.

Two girls were waiting in his bed. Both awake.

Probably, the noise he'd made as he'd dragged his useless body through the apartment had woken them.

As he collapsed onto the bed, they reacted in very different ways.

Jen rushed off to find a first-aid kit. Maya rolled him onto his back and straddled him, gazing down at him with flushed cheeks as she began dry humping him.

"Was it monsters?" She asked eagerly, eyes twinkling. "How many are there? Where are they? What'd they look like?"

She bit her lip, closed her eyes, let out a soft moan.

Jason closed his eyes too.

The dark embrace on unconsciousness snatched him away.

He awoke to Maya cuddling him, Jen sitting in a chair beside the bed. His chest and face were covered in bandages, as were his feet.

His heart thundered under the Red Shard.

Halen Venitus had a Morph Belt.

The 'how' and the 'why' didn't matter. The fact that Jason's enemies possessed a Belt changed nothing. He still needed to stop them. They still needed to die. The Belt would complicate things, make Halen a whole lot harder to kill, but the end result would be the same.

Maya pressing her body to his cut off the rest of Jason's thoughts. His mind focused in on his girlfriend's massive tits. Naked tits with pretty pink nipples.

Jason gripped the girl, shoved her onto her back and climbed atop her. Maya woke up with a yelp of surprise.

As soon as she realised what was happening, the slut let out a happy squeal. Spread her legs eagerly. She reached up, cupped Jason's chin, smiled up at him with lust-filled eyes.

A minute later, the bedsprings were squeaking.

He rutted above Maya, thrusting and fucking, staring down into her hazy eyes and the mindless oblivion behind them. An empty shell of arousal and sex appeal with nothing beneath.

Was it monsters? Maya's voice echoed in the back of his skull.

How many are there?

Where are they?

It didn't take long before he was emptying himself inside her, rolling off her slutty body and sitting up in bed. Beside him, Maya whined her disappointment.

The sudden urge to grab her by the throat and throttle her flared. With effort, Jason pushed it down.

"Partial Morph," he grunted, reaching down for his Belt.

The red and white metal spread down his legs, over his bandaged feet. The rest of his body remained naked.

He climbed out of bed.

When Maya whined behind him, he ignored her.

Burn her, the Red Shard whispered into his mind.

Jason shuddered.

Some part of him *wanted* to. A tiny, dark, cold part of him wanted to listen to the power. Incinerate Maya and Jennifer and everything else around him. Set fire to the whole world, bask in the flames and fury.

What was *happening* to him?

He headed to his apartment's kitchen, searched cupboards for snacks. But, before he found anything, a loud *thumping* echoed through the apartment. A fist on wood.

Someone wrapping on the apartment's front door.

Jason hesitated.

As soon as he heard the sound, he knew who it must be. Knew it deep in his soul. He'd attacked Halen Venitus in his own home, burned the whole place to the ground. Of course there was going to be retaliation. Of course they'd come for him.

Really, it was a surprise they hadn't come sooner. Venitus goons. Maybe even Shard Monsters – though why they'd *knock*, Jason had no clue.

He groaned, closed the cupboard, made his way to the apartment's entrance.

No need to put a shirt on. It'd only come off when the fighting started. And no need to hide his Belt or Suit-covered legs.

"Let's get this over with," he sighed.

When he reached the front door, he gripped the handle with one hand and touched his Belt with the other. Ready to Full-Morph the moment he opened the door.

Burn it, the Red Shard whispered.

He turned the door handle, swung the door open.

He opened his mouth, but the words didn't come.

A single figure stood on the other side of the doorway. A raised eyebrow on his wizened, wrinkled face.

Jason stumbled back, eyes wide.

"Hmph," the man grunted, shaking his head in disapproval.

It'd been so long... That couldn't be...

Jason gaped at the old man.

"Gramps?"