

## Shard Warriors – Vol.2

### Chapter 9

#### Norman

He sat back in his throne, patiently awaiting his coronation.

To think, he'd once been an impatient man. Back when he'd *been* a man. The eager scientist who'd wanted to save the world and win prizes and go down in history.

Oh, he'd go down in history. After today, every history book written would include him in some way. He'd see to that.

What better way to ensure his legacy than to write it himself?

The perks of immortality.

When he wrote about his rebirth, which date would he use?

The day he'd bonded the White Shard? The day his friend had killed him? What about today and all the changes it'd bring?

He set the thought aside as the throne room's door swung open and a Purple Monolith entered. A tall, humanoid creature with an oversized, pulsating cranium. Purple chitin covered the Monolith from bulbous head to insectoid feet. No clothes; why hide one's divinity? A single Purple Shard glowed in the centre of the Monolith's chest.

"Master," the Purple Monolith's screechy voice uttered as it fell onto one knee before him. "The puppets are nearing the compound."

"Good," Norman nodded. "Are the branches ready?"

"Yes, master," the insect-like Monolith said in its scratchy, screechy voice. "They wait on your command. Your minions are prepared and positioned. Everything is ready."

One word was all it'd take. A single word to set everything into motion, change the world forever.

"Wait until the *guests* are in the throne room," he said, waving his hand dismissively. "Once they're in here, give the command. I trust you to handle everything until I've dealt with them."

"Of course," the Monolith said, standing and bowing. "Master."

As the Monolith began rushing out of the room, Norman called after it. Sent out a Purple pulse to freeze the Monolith mid-step.

"Send for my grandson," Norman commanded. "It's only fitting he be here for what comes next. And have a few Ascended join him."

"Monoliths or *Polyoliths*?" The disdain the insectoid had for Polyoliths was evident in its snarl. "Master." It added quickly.

"Both," Norman shrugged. "Any that don't already have assignments. I won't need them to fight. Just to be decorative."

"Yes master," the Purple Monolith bowed its head, left the room.

Alone again, Norman rose from his throne.

The room he was in was huge. A former warehouse cavern that'd been redesigned. Sterile white tiles made up the floors. Plain, white-painted concrete walls. A high ceiling. A massive, empty space. Perfect as an arena.

Not that he *wanted* it to come to that.

Robert Finnegan – who went by Malcolm Morose these days – and his gang of young fighters, in a perfect world, would join Norman of their own accord. Certainly, he knew at least one of them had seen the light. But this wasn't a perfect world. Not yet. And all six of them joining Norman, becoming a part of his new world, was wishful thinking at best.

Grey Robert, his would-be murderer, wasn't going to flip sides.

Red Jason, the team leader, would likely set himself against Norman. If for no other

reason than his juvenile rivalry with Halen.

Blue Brian, Norman was certain, would flip.

Green Jennifer. Now there was one that could go either way. The time he'd spent with the girl, filling her mind with Purple's power, would count for a lot. Knowing her heart; her distress and the escapism she used to cope with it... Seeing which side she fell on would be interesting.

Yellow Abigail. Another one that could go either way. Though Norman wasn't holding out too much hope there. Out of all of them, he'd touched Abigail's mind the least. Still, perhaps she'd see reason by herself, without the need for outside influence.

Pink. Maya. Winning her over to the cause would either be as simple as presenting her with monster cock, or it'd be impossibly difficult. It all depended on how sex-motivated the girl had become.

He thought about it for a moment, came to a decision.

It took less than a heartbeat of desire for his body to transform, two huge shapes bursting painlessly from Norman's back.

His controlled mutation tore away his clothes.

Yes. This was the way.

## Jason

"We should split up," Maya's Suit-muffled voice said.

Jason paused, turned back to look at her.

The Pink had her hands behind her back, chest forward, head tilted innocently.

"Why?" Jason asked, his own voice warped by his Red Suit. "That'll just make us easier targets."

"Cover more ground," Maya hummed. "This place is like a maze. And it's *huge*. If we split up-"

"No," Jason grunted. "We stick together."

"But-"

"No."

He turned away from her, continued walking.

The others fell in step behind him.

Red, Grey, Blue, Green, Yellow, Pink.

The last time they'd been together like this... Jason could barely remember. It was so long ago. And so much had happened since then. That past felt like a forgotten dream.

He kept his eyes forward, kept on walking.

They hadn't encountered anyone. Not a single person.

Each checkpoint they'd passed had been unmanned. Every room and section of the hidden, underground laboratory was deserted.

All they could do was keep moving deeper in.

When a loud, beeping tune played, Jason flinched. His body instinctively fell into a combat stance. Low, coiled, ready to strike. But the beeping chimes only sounded a few times, from speakers in the ceilings.

"How nice of you to join me," a familiar voice sounded from the speakers. "On this most auspicious of days."

Jason's head darted around. Quickly found one of the speakers and a small surveillance camera attached to it.

"Show yourself!" Jason barked, raising a hand to point at the camera. "Coward! Come out and face us!"

"I do hope you're not ranting and raving, Jason," Norman's voice sounded from the speaker again. "I can see you, but there aren't any microphones in these cameras. I can't

hear a word you're saying, I'm afraid."

"Bastard!" Jason snarled.

For good measure, he flipped the camera off.

"Message received," Norman chuckled over the speaker system. "Keep moving forward. You're not far from where I am. I'll guide the way, don't worry."

The urge to ignore the man was overshadowed by Jason's desire to crush him into pulp.

He continued walking, his team behind him.

"You know, Jason," Norman's voice echoed through the endless corridors. "You can still save the world. You can lead your team at my side, serve as my champions of justice. It's not too late for you to see the light, fulfil your true purpose."

"Don't listen to him," the Grey said.

"And you, Robert," Norman continued. "Or do you prefer Malcom? Either way, I'll never say no to a competent scientist. You know more about that wonderous metal than anyone. I'd happily trade my knowledge of Shards for that information. Think! We could be partners in science again."

Gramps didn't say anything to that. Just kept marching on.

"All I want is to build a better world," Norman's loud voice said. "I'm sure you can relate to that, Brian and Abigail. Imagine it. A world without war or conflict, without hunger or disease or inequality. That is what I can bring. With my Shards, anything is possible!"

"Poison," Gramps muttered. "Ignore it."

"I can take the pain away," Norman promised. "Make it so you never have to think about it again. I can give you everything you want. And all I ask in return is your loyalty. A small price to pay to be free and happy, all your dreams and desires come true."

Jason balled his fists, a hot rage building inside him.

*Burn him*, a voice in the back of Jason's mind whispered. *Incinerate. Destroy. Murder him.*

A voice he knew he couldn't blame on a Red Shard this time.

"Not far now," Norman told them. "Take a right here, then just ahead..."

Jason followed the instructions, embracing that dark voice.

He gripped the small capsule in his fist. Not too tightly – he didn't want to accidentally break it. But, through the Red Suit's metal, he could feel it. A weapon that could kill Norman Venitus.

Which meant it'd probably kill Halen Venitus too.

That fucker's death was long overdue.

He was grateful for the Suit's helmet as he barged into Norman's throne room. He didn't want anyone to see the wide, insane grin on his face.

## Gramps

That... That was a lot of Shard Monsters.

Arrayed behind Norman's throne in a mass of mutated bodies. Dozens and dozens of them. From towering, lizard-like abominations to hairy creatures that resembled apes, to feathered and beaked beasts with talons and claws. Every sort of twisted representation of nature and more.

Most of the Shard Monsters bore multiple shards, their mutations random and weird. One with porcupine spines covering it, another that seemed almost fish-like in appearance. A majority of them had three Shards; Orange and Yellow being the most common pairing, with Green appearing often amongst them. But a few had more unusual Shards bonded to their chests. Red, Blue, Aquamarine, Lavender, Purple.

A few of the Shard Monsters had only a single Shard.

Those, curiously, seemed more human in appearance. Not hulking, oversized creatures. But humanoid, with awareness and understanding behind their irises. Still mutated, but with mutations that seemed to match their solitary Shards – at least in colour.

What seemed to be a man with charred, rock-like skin had flames sprouting from places there should have been hair. His scalp, jaw, chest, armpits, groin and arms and legs. Fire sprouted from all of them, flowing unnaturally in a breezeless room. In the centre of his chest-fire, a Red Shard glowed brightly.

Another, what'd once been a shapely woman, had tree bark for skin and vines for fingers and toes. Flower petals for eyelids that half-hid her bug eyes. Above tree-bark breasts, a Green Shard glowed.

Too many Shard Monsters to fight.

At least, too many to fight with any hope of survival.

If they could take Norman down with them, their deaths would be more than worth the sacrifice.

Speaking of Norman...

Gramps turned his attention to Norman Venitus, for now setting aside the fact that Halen Venitus – fully Morphed in the Black Suit – was standing to one side of the man.

Norman stood stark naked, a chiselled Adonis with perfect abs and bulging pecs, all muscle and no fat. Between Norman's legs dangled a cock so large and long that it drooped well past his knees, near enough a third leg. And, sprouting from the man's back were two massive, white-feathered, angelic wings.

"Halen," Jason whisper-growled.

"He's got the Black Belt," Abigail added quietly. "And all those Shard Monsters. Maybe we should retreat, rethink-"

"No!" Jason snapped. "This ends *today*."

"Could be worse..." Gramps shrugged.

*Halen could've found the White Belt instead of the Black.*

Fortunately, *that* monstrosity was still safe where he'd hidden it all those years ago. Useful as the White Belt might've been in a situation like this, it was far too unstable to be relied upon. And the consequences of using it... No. Far better to leave it where it was.

"If we don't do this now," he said, pushing the White Belt from his mind, "we might never get another chance."

## Jason

The six of them strode across the throne room, stopping at a safe distance from Norman and Halen. Fifteen to twenty feet.

"So, what's it going to be?" Norman said, looking magnanimous with arms and wings outstretched. "Join me and help build a new, perfect world. Or fight and die? Now's the time to choose."

"Fuck you," Jason spat. "We'd never-"

His voice cut off as Brian strode forward, took a place at Norman's side, turned to face the rest of the team. Face hidden behind Blue's helmet, body falling into a combat-ready stance.

"Traitor!" Jason shouted.

The rest of the team remained in a stunned silence.

Until Jen, head lowered, Green Suit hugging her body, stepped forward too. Walked slowly across the divide and joined Brian besides Norman.

Jason gaped. Spun to look at what remained of his team.

A stunned Gramps. Abigail, who'd taken a step back in shock. And Maya, who trembled in place, knees wobbling as she hugged herself.

"Come, Maya," Norman smiled. "My cock needs seeing too. Aren't you curious how it tastes?"

Maya moaned, took a shaky step towards him.

"No!" Jason said, reaching an arm out. Something inside him shattered when Maya ignored him, kept on inching towards Norman.

When she reached him, she fell to her knees, head bowed.

"Sir," Brian said, looking to Norman. "They have *these*. Gramps called them 'weapons'."

And, just like that, Brian tossed his capsule to the enemy.

Norman snatched it out of the air, examined it.

"There's a syringe inside," Brian added. "Gramps believes it's something that'll kill you if injected."

"Brian," Gramps whispered, voice full of sorrow. "Why?"

The Blue ignored him.

Norman uncapped the capsule, examined the needle. Then he extended the arm holding it.

The arm elongated, transformed. One minute, it was a muscled man's arm, the next it was the body of a snake. The limb slithered through the air, guiding the tiny syringe towards a random Shard Monster.

As soon as the needle penetrated skin, the Shard Monster wailed. It collapsed to the floor, spasming. Then it froze, eyes wide. Dead. The body disintegrated, leaving behind an intricate web of white-metal strands which, an instant later, collapsed into dust.

It took less than a second from the syringe stabbing flesh to the Monster being reduced to a pile of dust on the floor. If Jason had blinked, he'd have missed it.

"Fascinating," Norman said, arm returning to normal, empty syringe discarded. "How many of those do they have?"

"Two more," Brian answered immediately. "Gramps has one, Jason the other."

"Fucker!" Jason growled, clutching his capsule.

"Brian," Norman commanded, "fetch the syringe 'Gramps' has. Grandson, I believe you and Jason have some unfinished business. Get me his syringe while you're settling things. Jennifer, make sure Abigail here doesn't interfere. And you..." He planted his hand atop Maya's head as the others squared off. "Time to put those talents of yours to good use."