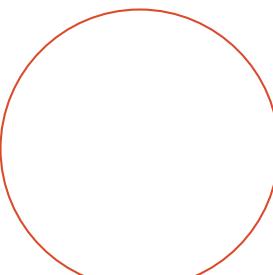
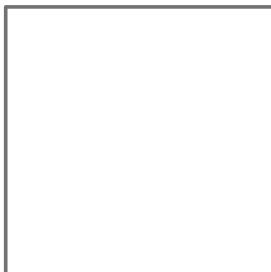


Marc's Angels'

Weight of Seconds

BEAR THE WEIGHT OF WHAT'S LOST.

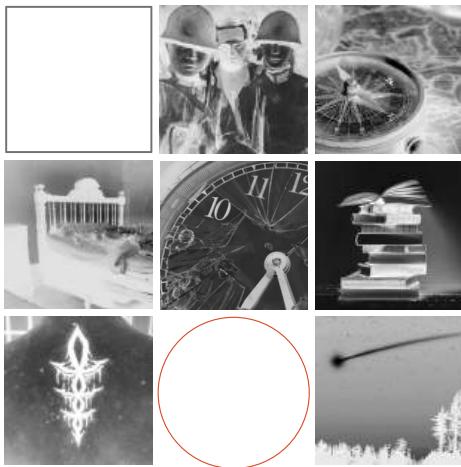


ARGUEZA • CORTEZ • LAUDE • PAYALES • PROTACIO • PUNSALAN

A.Y. 2024-2025

Weight of Seconds

BEAR THE WEIGHT OF WHAT'S LOST.



BEAR THE WEIGHT OF WHAT'S LOST.



When Shadows Reign

By: Marc Argueza

The storm lashed at the jagged spires of the obsidian palace, its fury spilling into the rain-slicked streets of Shadowmoor. Below the brooding fortress, a crowd gathered in the square, faces obscured by hoods and fear. Standing in an obsidian platform above them, crimson-cloaked and wreathed in shadows, is Victor Maledictus.

“Do you think I do this for myself?” Victor’s voice sliced through the howling wind, a commanding baritone that silenced murmurs in the crowd. His arms spread wide, his presence amplified by the shadows that coiled and hissed around him. “You may curse my name, but it is my strength that shields you from ruin. Without me, Shadowmoor would fall.”

The storm punctuated his words with a crack of lightning, illuminating the faces below. Some were streaked with tears, others hardened by quiet rage. Most bore the resignation of people long accustomed to fear. Yet hidden among them, cloaked and silent, stood Lucian, his jaw set, his gaze locked on the man he had once called brother. Shadowmoor had not always been a land of despair. Before the Great Betrayal, it was a kingdom held together by ancient pacts and delicate alliances. Beneath its soil lay rivers of mana, arcane energy that brought both prosperity and envy. Greed and ambition ignited the conflict, shattering Shadowmoor into warring factions.

Lucian, the youngest son of a noble house, watched his family’s estate burn as rivals fought over mana-rich lands. His parents were slaughtered in their hall,

their sigil trampled into ash. He fled into the wilderness, a broken knight clinging to survival with little more than his blade.

Victor's rise began in the same chaos. A low-born knight, he had fought valiantly for his lord, only to be abandoned on the battlefield when the tide turned. Left for dead among the bodies of his comrades, Victor clawed his way back from the brink, forging alliances with outlaws and sorcerers. He survived not through honor, but through sheer will.

It was on the battlefield of Drakenshire that Lucian and Victor's fates intertwined. Lucian, wounded and pinned beneath a dying horse, had nearly given up when Victor appeared, dragging him from the carnage.

"You're a fool," Lucian had muttered through gritted teeth as Victor patched his wounds with torn strips of his cloak.

Victor had grinned, his face streaked with blood and mud. "Then you'll die beside one."

Their bond was forged in fire and desperation. Together, they rallied scattered survivors, defending what little remained of Shadowmoor from marauding warlords and broken armies. They dreamed of a united kingdom, rebuilt not through fear but through trust.

Victor's belief in trust shattered long before he found the Nexus. During the Great Betrayal, an ally betrayed him, leading his forces into an ambush that cost hundreds of lives. Victor survived, but the scars run deep. "Trust is weakness," he had told Lucian after. "It's a lie we tell ourselves so we can sleep at night."

Lucian disagreed. He held onto the moments that reminded him of what unity could achieve—a starving village sharing its last scraps with passing soldiers, a farmer offering his only horse to an injured knight. To him, these acts of selflessness were proof that trust could endure even in the darkest times.

Their opposing ideals came to a head when they uncovered the Black Nexus, buried beneath the ruins of Cravenhold. The relic pulsed with dark energy, its surface slick with shadows that seemed alive. Even before Victor touched it, Lucian could feel its malevolence, a whisper of danger in the air.

“Leave it,” Lucian had urged, his voice trembling. “This thing—it’s wrong. I can feel it.”

Victor’s expression was resolute. “Shadowmoor is dying, Lucian. What would you have me do? Watch it rot while we wait for miracles?”

“There’s always another way,” Lucian said.

Victor’s voice hardened. “There isn’t.”

When Victor touched the Nexus, the world seemed to shift. Shadows erupted from the relic, enveloping him in their suffocating embrace. Lucian watched in horror as the darkness seeped into Victor’s skin, transforming him.

When the shadows receded, Victor stood changed. His eyes glowed faintly, and the darkness that had bound him now obeyed his will. He had become something more than a man—and something far less.

With the power of the Nexus, Victor crushed the remnants of the noble houses and unified Shadowmoor under his banner. His Umbra Knights, sorcerers bound to the Nexus's dark magic, became the enforcers of his will.

But unity came at a price. The Nexus's corruption spread like a blight, withering crops and poisoning mana streams. Villages were forced to tithe whatever remained to the capital, their people left starving and broken. Victor ruled through fear, making public examples of dissenters.

In one village, a farmer who spoke out against the tithes was dragged to the town square. Before his family's eyes, Victor summoned shadows to strip the man's flesh, his screams echoing through the fields. "This," Victor had proclaimed, his voice as cold as the storm above, "is what defiance brings."

To Victor, such measures were necessary. The chaos of the Great Betrayal had shown him that trust could not be relied upon. Fear was a simpler currency, one that left no room for betrayal.

Lucian could not accept it. He had remained at Victor's side, hoping to reach the man he once knew, but the atrocities piled too high. Their final confrontation as allies came in the obsidian palace.

"This isn't the Shadowmoor we dreamed of," Lucian had said, his voice raw with anger. "You've turned it into a prison."

Victor's shadows rippled as he stepped closer. "Dreams are for fools, Lucian. You saw what happened during the Betrayal. Trust killed Shadowmoor. Fear will keep it alive."

Lucian left that night, abandoning his title, his lands, and his closest friend. In the years that followed, he became a fugitive, hunted by Victor's Umbra Knights. But Lucian did not run alone.

Lucian's rebellion began as a whisper. In the desolate outskirts of Shadowmoor, he rallied those who had lost everything to Victor's tyranny. Farmers whose fields had been razed, merchants bankrupted by impossible tithes, and soldiers disillusioned by their master's rule—all found a leader in Lucian.

He fought not just against Victor's tyranny but for a vision of Shadowmoor where people could live without fear. His rebellion was a stark contrast to Victor's rule: where Victor imposed control through power, Lucian inspired loyalty through sacrifice. He shared the hardships of his people, fighting alongside them in the mud and the rain, offering his blade and his life.

"Our strength," Lucian would tell his followers, "isn't in magic or might. It's in each other."

Though outnumbered and poorly armed, the rebellion survived, striking at supply lines and liberating villages. Each small victory kindled hope among the people, though Lucian knew the cost of defiance.

He had seen comrades die, their dreams snuffed out by Victor's enforcers. He had watched families torn apart, their homes burned as punishment for harboring rebels. Yet he pressed on, driven by the belief that a better Shadowmoor was possible.

Now, standing in the storm-drenched square, Lucian felt the weight of his choices. The people around him were not soldiers. They were farmers, merchants, and craftsmen—ordinary men and women who had suffered under Victor's rule.

Victor's voice rose again, pulling Lucian from his thoughts. "You have come here because you understand the price of disobedience," he said, his tone like dark velvet. "Tonight, we remind the world what it means to defy the hand that shields it. The stage is set, and the dance is ours to begin."

Lucian stepped forward, pulling back his hood. Gasps rippled through the crowd as his face was revealed. To some, he was a symbol of hope. To others, a fool chasing a lost cause.

"Victor," he called, his voice cutting through the storm.

Victor turned, his crimson robes rippling as he faced his old comrade. His lips curled into a cold smile. "Ah, Lucian," he said, mockingly. "My sweet, loyal knight returned at last. Have you come to share tales of your futile rebellion?"

Lucian squared his shoulders. "I've come to end this."

Victor laughed, the sound hollow. "And with what army?"

Figures emerged from the crowd—farmers gripping pitchforks, merchants holding tools, soldiers clutching swords. Their faces were etched with resolve.

Victor's smile faded. "Do you think this rabble can stand against me?"

“It’s not about standing against you,” Lucian said, his gaze steady. “It’s about showing them that they can.”

Victor descended from the obsidian platform with measured steps, his crimson robes rippling in the storm. Shadows coiled around him, restless and alive. His gaze, cold and disdainful, locked onto Lucian.

“You always were the dreamer,” Victor said, his voice a low growl. “Dreams, Lucian, are the first things to die in the face of reality.”

Lucian drew his sword, its runes flickering faintly in the storm’s light. “Some dreams are worth dying for.”

Victor struck first, his hand rising in a sharp gesture. Tendrils of shadow surged forward, writhing through the air like serpents. Lucian stepped aside, his boots splashing through puddles as his sword intercepted the attack. The blade’s protective enchantments flared, dispersing the dark energy with a hiss.

“You think your tricks can challenge me?” Victor sneered, his tone biting.

Lucian didn’t reply, his focus unshaken. Victor’s strikes came in relentless waves, but Lucian deflected them with precision, each move honed by years of training. Victor’s power was overwhelming, but predictable—relying on dominance and brute force. Lucian countered with speed and precision, forcing Victor to retreat. The battle unfolded before the crowd, a clash of light and shadow. For years, they had seen Victor as an untouchable force, but Lucian’s defiance ignited something within them.

“He’s holding his own,” a farmer whispered. “If he can fight Victor, why can’t we?” another murmured, clutching a pitchfork.

Victor noticed the whispers spreading through the crowd. His gaze flicked toward them, his lips curling into a sneer. “You think these people will rise for you, Lucian? They’re sheep. They’ve cowered under my rule for years because they know the truth. Without me, Shadowmoor would fall into chaos.”

Lucian sidestepped another shadow strike, his voice calm but firm. “You haven’t kept them alive, Victor. You’ve kept them afraid. There’s a difference.”

Victor hesitated for a fraction of a second. The storm of memories clawed at him—Drakenshire, the flames licking the battlefield, and Lucian at his side, bloodied but unyielding. Victor had saved him then, not because it was pragmatic, but because they had believed in the same dream.

Lucian surged forward, exploiting the momentary lapse. His blade flashed, slicing through Victor’s defenses. The edge of the sword grazed Victor’s side, tearing through his crimson robes.

The crowd gasped as Victor staggered, his hand flying to the wound. Dark blood seeped between his fingers. Though the injury was shallow, it was enough to shatter the illusion of his invincibility.

Lucian lowered his sword slightly, his breath ragged. “They see it now, Victor. You can be hurt. You’re not untouchable.”

Victor’s face contorted with rage. “You fool!” he roared, his voice echoing

through the square. Shadows erupted from him in a violent torrent, forcing Lucian back. The storm above seemed to echo his fury, lightning splitting the sky in jagged arcs.

Victor loomed over Lucian, dark energy crackling around his hand. “You’ve accomplished nothing!” he spat. “Do you think a single wound will undo me?”

Lucian, battered but resolute, met his gaze. Blood trickled down his temple as he smiled faintly. “It’s not the wound that matters. It’s the fact that they’ve seen you bleed. That’s enough.”

Before Victor could strike, a small figure emerged from the crowd—a child no older than ten. She clutched Lucian’s fallen sword, her tiny frame straining under its weight. Victor froze. The shadows around him trembled as he stared at her, memories clawing at him. He saw himself as a boy, clutching a broken blade on a battlefield, defying impossible odds.

The crowd surged behind her, emboldened by her courage. Farmers raised their pitchforks, merchants hefted tools, and soldiers stepped forward with renewed purpose.

Victor’s gaze swept over them, his face unreadable. For years, they had feared him, obeyed him, but now they stood together, their faces defiant.

Lucian’s voice, weak but steady, broke through the chaos. “Victor,” he said, “it’s not too late. You can still choose to be the man you once were.”

Victor's hand trembled as the shadows around him wavered. For a moment, doubt pierced through the darkness. He stared at Lucian, then at the crowd.

But the moment passed. His face hardened, his expression an icy mask. "The man I once was died with the Betrayal," he said coldly. With a final surge of power, he unleashed a wave of shadow that sent the crowd staggering back. Lucian was thrown against the cobblestones, his body limp but still breathing. Victor turned away, his crimson robes trailing behind him as he ascended the steps to the obsidian spire. The storm began to subside, the thunder fading into the distance.

Lucian was carried from the square by his followers, his body broken but his spirit unyielding. His defiance had become a rallying cry for the oppressed, a symbol of hope that would not be extinguished.

In the weeks that followed, the rebellion spread. Villages once gripped by fear began to rise, their people rallying around the story of Lucian's stand. The child who had lifted his sword became a legend, her bravery inspiring countless others to join the fight.

Far above the city, Victor sat alone in his tower, staring into the void. The shadows whispered to him, restless and accusing. For the first time, his victory felt hollow. Shadowmoor's tale was no longer one of conquest, but of the unyielding battle between fear and hope.

And as the rebellion grew stronger, Victor Maledictus wondered if he had chosen the wrong side.

BEAR THE WEIGHT OF WHAT'S LOST.



Promise to the Heavens

By: Erlkrismar Cortez

During a rainy night, in a room where the only light that shines through is the night lamp and the moonlight, a mother tucks her child, and comforts him from the storm. She offered her child to read a certain story to sleep. “Don’t worry, I promise I will always be with you”, as the mother said to her child. As the child lost the fear in his eyes and finally relaxed, the mother smiled solemnly as she started to read. |

Once upon a time, there was a boy. He was energetic, kind, and loved by everyone in his village. He played day and night with other children, helping everyone he came across. The villagers would also dote on him and offer meals and a place to sleep with his friends. It was every child’s dream. Wanting to keep this kind of life and express his gratitude, he gathered everyone and shouted as much as he could to reach the skies above, that he shall protect everyone and this village that he loves so much forever. And as if heaven was listening, the sun shone brightly to the village that day.

The child asked his mother, “Is the boy real?”

“Of course honey, stories are the tales of those who achieved their dreams.”, the mother answered.

Since that day, the boy’s growth has been something extraordinary. Even without training, his strength far exceeded his age, something that is unexpected for a human. The villagers were frightened by his strength at first. But their fear ended as they still saw the same kind boy within him. As the boy went out hunting, he

encountered someone that was heavily injured. The man, wearing a tattered robe, was someone that the boy was suspicious of as he knew that the man was not from his village. But before the boy could do anything, the man suddenly collapsed to the ground. Shocked by the situation, the boy's body moved first to help the man without knowing what the consequences may be. He immediately returned to the village with the man to tend to its wound. While the villagers were scared of who he brought back, they eventually helped the boy look after the man.

It was only days for him to fully recover from his wounds. When asked for his name, he simply introduces himself as an adventurer who vowed to defeat the demons who destroyed his hometown. He expressed his gratitude to the boy and the village. When asked as to why he was nearby, the man told them that he was there to meet someone in the village, as he looked towards the boy. After everyone left, with only the boy remaining, The adventurer asked the boy if he had someone to protect. The boy told the adventurer that he loves everyone in the village and rejected the adventurer's offer before he could even ask the boy to join him.

After a brief silence, The adventurer told the boy about his sudden growth as if he knew everything about the boy. The adventurer also offered the boy to teach him and his friends how to become strong enough to defend their village and vowed to stay with them until they are ready. The boy wanting to refuse the offer once

again was stopped by his friends, Keith and Michael who happened to listen to their conversation. They immediately accept the adventurer's offer without talking to the boy. Keith told the angered boy that since they are already training, they want to be trained by someone like him to be as strong as the boy. Michael also encouraged the boy to go outside with the adventurer once they are able to protect the village since they want to hear his story. Without his imagination since his friends didn't see the light, and would quickly dismiss it.

Years pass by as the adventurer continues to train the boy and his friends. And finally, before the dawn breaks, the adventurer told everyone that their training is already finished, and that he and the boy shall leave as soon as the sun rises. Although shocked, they said their goodbyes and told the boy to leave the explanations to the villagers in their hands. The boy, grateful to his friends and to the village, promised to his friends to one day return with stories and gifts that he can share with everyone. As the boy walked away with the adventurer towards the sun as it cast its light to them.

“What was the boy’s name?”, as the question riddled the child the whole time.

“I am not sure, but I heard that people around the world called him Souterre, just like you.”, the mother cleverly answered while patting Souterre’s head.

“Where is he now? What happened to his friends and the village? What about the adventurer?” Souterre continued to ask, like his questions came from a bottomless well.

The mother, tired from all her work, told Souterre, “Well if you really want more of his stories, we can read them some other time. The thunder that you are so scared of has already left a while ago.”

“Are you sure? Promise?” Souterre hopefully asked.

“Just like the boy. I promise.” The mother replied.

“And... If you sleep now and behave.” Adding to her promise while rubbing Souterre’s head.

Souterre, still thinking of the story about the boy, smiled as he fell asleep imagining being the boy in his next adventures.

As Souterre finally sleeps, his mother stays by his side. She whispered to herself, “Promises are built from trust. Trust to the self who spoke of it that they shall follow their words whatever the future holds, trust to the one who received that they shall uphold their part. And to the universe that there is someone listening that would carry the burden of the promise.”

After a short pause while caressing her son’s head, she continued, “I’m sorry... I’m sorry that your destiny was decided by others. I’m sorry because of the hardships that a child like you will encounter.”

As her tears fell on his son's bed, she continued. "But I trust you, that you will overcome whatever challenge you face. For you are my son and that I will forever love you." After wiping her tears, the mother closes the window curtains, leaving the night lamp as the only source of light, she finally kisses Souterre goodnight and leaves his room with guilt showing through her face.

The next day came. As Souterre woke up and walked to the kitchen, his mother, after finishing cooking breakfast, greeted Souterre.

"Morning honey, breakfast is ready. Eat your breakfast and wait for Papa to come back home."

"But what about the story?", Souterre asked impatiently.

"I'm sorry but it will have to wait until I come back. Unless you want to have Papa read it for you."

"No thanks, Papa always falls asleep right when he returns. Besides, I want you to read it to me." Souterre said while full of food in his mouth.

"What have I taught you about table manners? Don't talk when your mouth is full!" "I'm sorry" While still having food in his mouth.

"Anyways, I'll head out now. I promise, let's read it together after I come back. So keep the house safe and behave. Like always."

"Yeah, promise!"

As the mother left and closed the door, Souterre began his own adventure in their house. He took some paper and began drawing anything

that came to his mind. He drew the boy and his friends, their village, and the adventurer based on what he thinks they looked like. He drew their weapons, swords, spears, and other weapons they used during their training. As his imagination continued, he took the broom and swung it like a sword, imitating their training. However, as Souterre got tired and bored of waiting, an idea of following his mother suddenly came through his mind, as if someone else suggested it to him. Souterre contemplated whether he should go or not, but ended up following the plan.

As he stepped outside, Souterre traced their path whenever he went out shopping with his mother. He walked and walked until he reached the place where his mother usually worked. The place was different from all the other buildings near it. With its staggering height and size, and the oldness it extrudes compared to its surrounding. Souterre thought back one last time if he should really go, however as his curiosity and boredom got the better of him, he stepped inside to find his mother.

Souterre called his mother but no matter how many times, his voice that echoed through the vast hallways was the only one who answered him. The deeper Souterre went inside the building, the more silent the place felt. As the fear of Souterre grew, he looked inside each room while repeatedly calling, “Ma?”.

After some time, Souterre heard a noise in a room across the building. Souterre, scared of the whole situation, rushed towards it thinking that his mother was there. Arriving at the room, Souterre saw his mother sitting on the ground. However, Souterre would only realize after

going inside that his mother was injured with an unknown person standing across the room. Someone whose face cannot be seen no matter how hard he tried and a silhouette that was hidden behind the robe he is wearing.

“Don’t worry... everything will be alright” The mother asked Souterre as she reached her son.

“...I’m sorry. I’m sorry, it’s my fault, I shouldn’t have come.” As tears come out of his eyes, regretting his decisions.

“No, I’m sorry. It’s not your fault. I’m actually glad you are here. Can you help Mommy, and let’s get out of this place as soon as possible.”

The unknown man, surprised by the appearance of a child, knocks his mother out and reassures Souterre that he will not harm his mother and that he is only checking on someone.

“Why is a child in this place?” as his calming voice asked the terrified Souterre.

“I suppose you’re her child. Then, If you want your mother to be safe, answer my question.

What’s your name, boy?”

“...Souterre” With Souterre mustering all his remaining strength to answer.

The man stopped as if Souterre’s answer reminded him of his past. “I see, I remember now! So he kept his promise!” as his voice became louder and echoed through the room.

Souterre, surprised by his answer, “Do you know him? The one in the book?” “If you meant Souterre, The Failed Savior, of course I know him” “What do you mean Failed Savior?” Souterre suddenly asked.

“If you want to know more, ask your mother. I will no longer answer your questions”

As the man told Souterre, a strong gust of wind stormed the room, followed by rescuers who were alerted to the situation. The man vanished along the winds and when Souterre asked the rescuers about the man, their answers were that of confusion as they didn’t know anything about what he was talking about.

Souterre, after calming down, went back to his mother and blamed himself until they reached the hospital. Looking at his mother lying in the emergency room, Souterre realized his mistakes, and could only cry and blame himself.

As the doctors finished examining his mother, they finally went to Souterre,

“Don’t worry, your mother will be fine.” The doctors reassured Souterre. Unable to accept this fate, Souterre could only say “I’m sorry, it’s all my fault.”

“Don’t blame yourself, without you, no one would’ve saved your mother.” As they try to consolidate the disheartened child.

As the situation calmed down, the doctors left Souterre and his mother alone.

“I promise. This time I’ll actually follow it. I promise to behave. I promise to do everything. So please... Wake up.” Souterre repeated as he fell asleep from exhaustion.

Outside the room where Souterre and his mother rests, the man watches the two of them while he talks to himself.

“Fate is the one that dictates how one would live during their lifetime. Just like how the laws of nature are present, without fate everything would be meaningless and would just crumble. It is unchangeable where not even divine beings could even imagine going against it... Or so it should be. To think that a promise made by humans has the ability to disrupt fate, and to entrust that to a child when He failed to do it that time. I hope that you will see through this until the end, and would not regret this decision. Or I guess you shall, for this is your fate... Avandra.”

“We shall meet again. I wish you good luck Souterre, for even I do not wish you this kind of fate. Promise... let’s just hope that someone listening to your promise would put their trust in you this time. To the promise that defies fate.”

BEAR THE WEIGHT OF WHAT'S LOST.



The Compass Within

By: Karl Laude

The sunlight pierces through the panels, and the chirping of birds fills the air, accompanied by the loud noise of passing vehicles. It's the usual start to the morning, but Eric's body feels heavy from the alcohol he drank at last night's party. The scene in front of him is a mess. Clothes are scattered across the floor, and the table is cluttered with empty bottles and half-eaten snacks.

"Spending time with them is amazing", Eric Marasigan said as he recalled the events from last night. As he looked around the room, something piqued his interest. In the corner of the room, an antique book can be seen. He remembered this book, which was from his late grandfather who always told him stories filled with magic and fantasy. The book's title was Netherlurk, a story about a sunless underworld where malevolent creatures lurk.

"This was Lolo's favorite book, he always read this to me when I was young, now that I think of it, he reads it as if he experienced the things inside," he said while holding his necklace, a golden compass that his grandpa left him with.

Eric's grandfather, whom he called Lolo, was a man of mystery and adventure. Though he had lived a quiet life after his military service, there were always rumors about his past. Some people said he had traveled to far places, strange lands filled with ancient ruins and dark secrets.

Lolo was a quiet person who didn't talk much about his past but he left behind enough clues for Eric to wonder if the old man had once been part of something far greater than anything he could imagine. One of the most peculiar things about Lolo was the compass—this simple, yet beautiful golden pendant that Eric wore now. He had inherited it after Lolo's passing. It wasn't just a memento; it was the key to a mystery that Lolo had hinted at many times, but never fully explained.

“Bringgg.....brrring”, his phone rang saying that it was already 10 A.M. “Oh no, I still need to go to work”, he said while quickly grabbing his towel and going to the bathroom. After 10 minutes, he was ready to go to work, wearing formal clothes that accentuated his sharp features, making him look more intimidating. “Wish me luck, Lolo,” he said while holding the compass.

Everything was normal until he felt the earth tremble. It started slow but as time went by, the intensity began to increase. Panicked screams can be heard all around, car alarms ringing, and sounds of cement cracking. Eric also panicked as the tremors were getting more intense as time passed, he started running, looking for an open field. The ground began to crack, quickly following him.

“Oh god, please stop this” he screamed while running as fast as he could, but to no avail. The ground beneath him was gone, he fell into the deep, pitch-black abyss. Suddenly, the earthquake stopped, and all the cracks closed, as if nothing happened confusing everyone.

Eric felt that he was falling for a long time, all he could see was pitch black. He was scared and anxious, overwhelmed by the feeling that he was falling to his doom. He screamed with all his might but nothing changed; it felt like he was falling for eternity. Suddenly, he felt a warm sensation spread across his chest, but it was quickly replaced by searing, jagged pain that shot through him like a bullet. It was as if something was driven into his flesh, the pressure grew unbearable. His vision started to blur, and the world around him spun wildly, sending him down spiraling into the darkness.

Eric's body hit the ground with a loud thud, the impact shook his bones and sent a wave of pain through him. For a moment, everything was silent but then he felt the pain again. He gasps for air while lying down for a moment, trying to steady himself. Slowly, he pushed himself up, still feeling heavy and sore.

"That...that hurt," he muttered, his voice shaky. He blinked, trying to clear his mind from the fall. He looked around, his eyes still adjusting to the darkness, he saw that he was in some sort of a cave. The walls were scattered with glowing moss that gave off a faint and eerie light. The light wasn't bright enough to illuminate the cave but it was enough for him to see the sharp rocks and uneven ground beneath his feet. The air felt cold and damp. He felt a sudden ache in his chest, reminding him of the dangers ahead.

"Where am I?" he whispered, his voice slightly trembling. His voice slightly echoed in the cave, but only silence was observed. The cave was vast and empty, making him feel completely alone. He tried to reach for his necklace to calm himself, but to his surprise, it was gone.

He suddenly remembered a memory of his grandfather telling him about Netherlurk. "A world beneath the ground... A place of darkness where creatures far worse than anything above crawl in the shadows...The compass is not just a tool to show direction, but a protector. It will guide you when you need it most. Always keep it with you.." His pulse quickened, and he kept telling himself that it was just a cave, a normal cave.

While trying to calm down, he heard growling echoing through the cave. He felt scared, however he felt something else—a strange pull from deep within his chest, an instinct to hide behind a rock.. He quickly hid and stayed quiet. The growling sound grew louder, and he could hear steps coming near. He held his breath, trying not to make any noise that could alarm the creature. He saw a huge muscular humanoid figure with a hideous face, almost 10 feet tall, carrying a huge wooden club. With each step that it takes, the cave slightly trembles.

“Is that an ogre?” he questioned himself, showing a shocked and scared face. “Am I in another world? I want to go home, I don’t want to be with ogres, or any other creatures in this world”, Eric thought. After a few moments, the ogre cannot be seen anymore. “Whew, I survived... but what should I do? I need to find the way back home.”

Eric finally dares to explore the cave, but he still feels something is pulling him towards a path like a compass. “Strange, I just lost my Lolo’s compass yet I can still feel it...Oh well, I’ll just follow where this feeling takes me.” He started to explore the cave quietly and carefully.

“Awoooo!!” He heard howling that seemed close to where he was standing. He heard the sound of footsteps that became clearer and louder as time passed by, he knew that something was coming. In just a few moments, he could clearly see what the creature that made that sound was, a wolf larger than normal was staring at him like a predator looking at its prey.

“I’m in trouble..big trouble,” he talked to himself. The wolf started to approach Eric, looking for an opportunity to attack him. Eric looked around hoping to find something to use against the beast. He started to feel something pull his eyes towards a certain direction. He noticed a glimmer beneath a rock.

After lifting the rock, he discovered an iron sword, “Jackpot!” He wielded the sword and pointed it at the wolf. The wolf lunged at Eric, opening its mouth and showing rows of sharp teeth ready to tear him apart. Eric quickly moved to the side and swung his sword, leaving a deep gash on the wolf, black blood spurted out. This made the wolf angry and became more aggressive in attacking him. He cannot dodge everything, the wolf claw was able to leave some serious wounds on Eric, but with a final thrust, he was able to penetrate the heart of the wolf.

Eric gasped, he was exhausted from the battle, clothes ripped, blood dripping out of his body. He quickly stripped his shirt and used it to cover his wounds. “That was a close one, I never want to experience that again...That feeling should be lolo’s compass...I should leave quickly before other creatures gather because of the smell of blood.”

After a few minutes of leaving, he found an entrance to a small space within the walls of the cave, “This would be a good camping spot.” He started to gather some moss and lit them up, creating a mini campfire, he made this area his camp.

He continuously explored the cave in the hope of finding a way back home with the help of the compass, each day fighting with monsters, avoiding deadly traps, discovering new areas, and learning more knowledge. Seconds become minutes, minutes become hours, hours become days, and after 5 days of exploring he was about to go crazy. Eric's a social butterfly and within these five days, he was all alone and this was almost enough to make him go crazy.

Luckily on his 6th day, he arrived at a huge arch, with a text filled with gold "Magna gladii thesaurum," which means that this was the great swordsman's treasure. "Lucky!" He said to himself. He hurriedly went inside only to find a small sword figure, he thought that this must be a key to something.

After an hour of searching the area, he found a hole in the wall where the sword could be placed. He stood there for a moment, staring at it, the familiar, yet unknown feeling of the compass stirring in his chest again. It was subtle, almost like a whisper, but it told him not to rush. It felt as if the compass was guiding him, urging him to think before acting. He felt a tightening sensation as though the air around him was alive, watching him, waiting for him to make his choice.

Eric's hand hovered near the wall. His mind raced, still unsure of what was happening, or if this was all a dream. His fingers tingled as they brushed against the stone, and the compass seemed to hum against his chest, a gentle reassurance that whatever lay ahead, he wasn't alone. The feeling deepened as he inserted the sword into the hole.

The cave trembled, and strong tremors shook the ground. A passage can be slowly seen opening. This made Eric smile, "Yes! Finally!". He ran towards the end of the passage, only to find out that he was not on earth anymore. The environment he saw was oppressively dark, with enormous ancient trees towering into the sky, two red moons can be seen in the night sky. "Noooo!!" he screamed as tears started to flow. He lost all hope like a candle fire being blown by the wind. He fell to the ground and was unconscious. After a few hours, he slowly opened his eyes. He started to hear voices – human voices!

BEAR THE WEIGHT OF WHAT'S LOST.



Longer

By: Wenadel Payales

To pause may be the privilege
I yearn for the most.
I'd like to pause even for a while amidst
The race of life and
To pause for my heart to beat three times the way
It did while packing things to leave home for college.

To pause from being a slave of nostalgia
and miss the present;
I pray for end to end, wishing it will never happen,
so it will remain 4pm at 4th Place
with my friends—enjoying our favorite
flavored chicken.

To pause, to linger, and to strike a pose
As I long for the mornings by the Legazpi coast,
then I go back to the 12th of May—
Soaked, with an inflatable in one hand,
And my sight was blocked by a sticky hair strand
as I walked against the wind uphill from a resort just as our car broke.

To pause to search for air
I could store what is breathtaking,
to relive it,
and live
as if deadlines do not exist,
and good moments stretch without limits.

A teacher asked, “To pause or to replay?”
Without hesitation,
I replied, “to pause,” and
whispered, “to stay,”
despite regretting attending
a seminar on my 18th birthday.

I want to pause to do more,
grow, and never age.

I yearn to pause to move on and be able to look back.
Can time slow down?
I want to stay more—
Longer.

Charity Trick

By: Wenadel Payales

You created a list
where the portal to different realities exists.
There—slices of something long existent, yet unseen, can be discovered,
And a minimum earner's perseverance is admired
For working almost 24/7 to earn
what could barely last for a week.

Your list produced a sound
that made listeners curious about the silent sobs.
It made them follow a path of heavy footsteps
made by empty stomachs weighed by hardships, and
accompanied by murmurs seeking to be freed from poverty,
which you thought of as a melody signaling to start a charity.

You shared your list
like casting magic called ‘exposing reality.’
It revealed a clip of a clacking chip vendor,
jingling in his pocket the peso he earned since dawn,
covered in sweat and playing in the traffic flow,
peeking at potential smokers out the windows.

You uploaded the list and someone laughed.
Your caption, “for those who fight fair,” led to clicks and
comments: “Fair? Really—when
the man is making a living out in blaze, and
you are at your air-conditioned car, comfortably
seated while filming him for a living?”

You added on the list:
A day in a life of being someone you are not.
You tried to imitate the life of one who always needs to work hard
to be rewarded for your goodness and feel grounded, and
soon, to your surprise—bad
because you could only do so much.

Your list was indeed magic,
an unenjoyable charity trick;
Nonetheless, it made the ignorant giggle.
It capitalized on the misfortune of others
that to them is reality and to you, perhaps is clout of
compiling uncountable clicks.

The list you made to inspire
ignited a futile hope and
motivated reforms—that is,
a documented senate hearing turned
to a spooky podcast,
uploaded on social media as if to entertain the mass.

Your plays rationed a thousand or two for the marginalized
for your account to monetize.
Has life ever been fair,
when your playlist for a good night sleep
is someone else's
sleep paralysis?

BEAR THE WEIGHT OF WHAT'S LOST.



Failure

By: Erin Protacio

Familiar,

Failure is all too familiar.

The disappointment that settles in your chest, too heavy to bear.

So heavy that the world collapses in on itself with you in it, unprepared

Familiar, like paths I've walked far too long,

Each step seemingly echoing with where I went wrong.

Abnormal,

All of it feels abnormal.

The way failure sits like an old companion at your side,

The way it mocks your every forward effort and stride.

Abnormal, the lingering presence you feel, even as it is gone, long past,

Turning the joy of triumph into something that could never last

Intriguing,

Sometimes, it is intriguing.

How it dredges up weaknesses buried deeply within,

How it sharpens your resolve even as it sinks its claws in.

Intriguing, how it seems to test and push every nerve,

Demanding I give far beyond what I can serve.

Lasting,

Sometimes, it can be lasting.

It leaves marks etched in you as you move forward in life

Reminders of lessons carved deep enough to leave scars like a sharp knife

Lasting, because it refuses to fade, to be erased,

A memory full of disappointment and pain, unwillingly embraced.

Unbearable,
It's always unbearable.
The disappointment that glistens in their stare,
The silence that seemingly lingers, heavy and bare.
Unbearable, the weight of not being enough—
The burden of falling, especially when life turns rough.

Real,
It's always real.
No matter how fiercely I try to deny,
No matter how desperately the tears fall and how fast they dry.
Real, in its hold that refuses release—
In its whispers of doubt that never cease.

Easy,
They say it's easy to rise again.
But picking up pieces from each hard, bitter fall,
To continue forward when all feels so lost and small.
Easy? No. Not in any way that's true—
It has the ability to teach, but it breaks me too.

Failure, a bitter pill that lodges in your throat, choking you
It leaks from your eyes as rivers of tears that refuse to stop,
It turns your ragged screams into a silence that is raw and burns and echoes.
It makes helplessness a tangible, physical thing, wrapping you tight,
pulling you close
It's honestly impressive, in its cruel persistence.

Oh my, oh dear

By: Erin Protacio

Oh my, oh dear, do you see that new little star?
Shining, shimmering, burning the brightest by far.
Everyone's attention, drawn to its twinkling light,
A spark so intense it rivals the moon at night.

But oh my, oh dear, with the little star's birth, her future was set in stone,
Written in the stars, a self-fulfilling prophecy would make itself known.
A tragic tale told, of the highest highs and lowest lows, of brilliance and strife,
For it is known—the star that burns the brightest has the shortest life.

Oh my, oh dear, so much praise keeps coming her way,
So the star pushed herself harder each passing night and day.
Yet as time passes by, the little star will soon understand
A brilliant star she may be, she is still stuck in the whims of fate's commands.

Oh my, oh dear, the prophecy is now coming to pass.
The weight of her triumphs grew heavy, her dazzling glow couldn't last.
Every success she had, all her work and effort spent, there would come a hidden cost,
Each small victory she gained, a larger piece of herself will be lost.

Oh my, oh dear, the pressure only grew and grew,
The expectations are now towering, it was almost out of her view.
Every success came with whispers and demands for more,
The weight and pressure became too heavy to carry, impossible to ignore.

Oh my, oh dear

By: Erin Protacio

Oh my, oh dear, how did the stakes grow so high?
A small slip? “You’re a failure!” others would cry
A tiny mistake cast such a dark shadow of shame,
A large one would mean the end of her name.

Oh my, oh dear, the pressure is now taking hold,
The star burned bright and hot, yet her world grew dim and cold.
She could never play games, could never dance in delight,
All she could be was her shine and her might.

Oh my, oh dear, she felt nothing at all,
Emotions turned to ash, burned off by the bright, bright wall.
Her shine was her purpose, her worth was her glow,
Yet deep in her heart, seeds of sorrow did grow.

Oh my, oh dear, her eyes held no spark,
No light of her own, only shadows and the dark.
She shone for the world, but inside she was dim,
A husk of a star with no life within.

Oh my, oh dear, she didn’t quite know,
That her sorrow ran deep, her spirit laid low.
For all she had known was this path paved with pain,
A bright-burning star caught in a cycle of strain.

Oh my, oh dear

By: Erin Protacio

Oh my, oh dear, in the end, the star flickered weak,
Her spirit was broken, her heart deeply fatigued.
In the past, she may have been the brightest in the sky
But now its a struggle, a struggle to even try

Oh my, oh dear, it hurt as she drifted alone,
A star with no warmth, just a heart turned to stone.
She burned with a brilliance that brought everyone but her delight—
The price of her glow was the absence of her own light.

BEAR THE WEIGHT OF WHAT'S LOST.



Live in Honor, Die in Courage

By: Lucas Punsalan

As I stared out into the winding horizon of Narra trees from the small opening in between the blinds of the briefing room window, I couldn't help but think about the life that awaited me. The life that I had left behind in *Kainan* years ago for this hellhole...

I look at my compass pointing north. Glass clear as day...

Cebu. We were still in *Cebu.* I had grown sick of waking up to the smell of napalm in the morning every day for the past two years.

About ten minutes later, the door clicked open, and Taicho Shinji Fujita entered the room carrying a thick folder under his right arm. He was a short man – about five feet and two inches – but his intimidating aura made him ten feet tall.

Taicho Fujita walked over to the center of the room, stood with his dark pupils sharply bolting around the white areas of his eyes while assessing how I presented myself. He dropped the folder onto the desk, creating a heavy thud and scattering a few loose papers across the table. I straightened under his cold and intimidating gaze even though these last two years have already hardened every bone and muscle in my body.

“Lieutenant Ohado,” he began, his voice brooding and deliberate, “this may be your last assignment... if the gods will allow it.”

I nodded, but my chest tightened. “If the gods allowed it,” I repeated to myself below my breath.

He sighed – a small, an almost imperceptible breath. He opened the folder, flipping past the first few pages until he reached one with a photo clipped over it. A photo of a man whose face looked as familiar as it was haunting. I had never seen him before, but I couldn't help but feel like I had known him. A name was scrawled in bold capital letters: "**TAICHO - HIRO ONODA.**"

"Onoda and his squadron were sent to *Lubang Island* two years ago on a mission to sabotage the enemy U.S. airstrip," Fujita said, his gaze now locked on the photo. "The mission failed, and Onoda's squadron was found dead on the coast of the island – thus intelligence had assumed that Onoda, too, had died in combat. Recent reports, however, revealed that Lieutenant Onoda may *still be alive* and hiding in an abandoned lighthouse behind the mountains of Lubang. Though they say he's... changed."

"Changed?" I asked, confused.

Fujita's lips pressed into a thin line. "Lost, Lieutenant. In more ways than one."

"That is why," he continued, "you are ordered to lead your assigned platoon with the mission objective to locate Taicho Hiro Onoda and bring him back... if possible."

He didn't say what "if possible" meant. I didn't ask. Missions like these usually carry an unspoken code, a fine line between honor and mercy.

Taicho Fujita left the folder on the table and marched towards the door. I took a deep breath and suddenly felt the cold heaviness of the duty presented to me, and the honor that I now had to protect once more. I headed for the door. The war, the life beyond it, and home could wait a little longer. For now, my future was dependent on the rescue of one man – Taicho Hiro Onoda.

Two days after I was called into Taicho Fujita's office, we landed on the *Lubang* port via ship, and I wasted no minute in leading my platoon of officers – Tadashi-san and Miyamoto-san – into the heart of the jungle. The island air felt dense, and we marched for the jungle with our weapons raised, senses at the maximum, and with eyes behind our heads.

As we headed for the mouth of the jungle, we came across a village filled with *Firipin-jin*. The women and children I passed by looked at me with visible fear – even offering me food and shelter in exchange for the guarantee that I don't harm them. The men of the village gazed upon me intimidatingly, and I felt their stares penetrate me even as my back was turned against them.

I did notice, however, that they seemed to ignore Tadashi-san and Miyamoto-san.

I look at my compass pointing slightly towards northeast. The glass is hazy from the temperature changes.

Eventually, the village faded from sight as we were swallowed by the jungle. The mission had truly begun, and day after day, we fell deeper into the jungle – its thick crown of trees closing over our heads like the jaws of an *Oni*. The atmosphere was humid, and each step we took sank our boots deeper into mud and roots, pulling our feet as if the earth itself was trying to keep us here.

I was losing track of time, of distance, even of my men – who have said nothing to me so far. They followed my orders faithfully, but each passing hour only further etched their visible exhaustion onto their faces.

The first two days on the island blurred with each other. The silence felt too unfitting for a mission this important. Every morning, we woke up to the sustained buzzing of cicadas, unceasing call of birds left unseen, and the occasional rustle of leaves that always left me tense and expecting an ambush. The jungle was taunting us.

Out of boredom before sleeping on the first night of the mission, I perused through Lieutenant Onoda's file and read his distinctions. *Order of the Rising Sun (5th Class), Promoted to Second Lieutenant (1944), Expert Marksman and Paratrooper Qualification, Distinguished Service Medal, Soshisha, Gunto*. The list went on. It was clear that this man was an important asset to the empire, and knowing this only furthered the pressure set on me to find him.

In the dead of that same night, Miyamoto-san jolted awake, swearing that he had heard and saw someone watching us sleep and passing us through the trees.

Miyamoto-san was the sharpest of us in the platoon, but after investigation, I eventually dismissed it that night as a false alarm, but I couldn't shake the feeling that someone was here. That maybe, Onoda was watching.

We had been briefed about Onoda's last reported whereabouts: on top of the abandoned lighthouse behind the northwest coast mountain range. But everything here looked the same. The trees towered over us, with branches and vines that poked our bodies amidst every twist and turn. The streams, obstacles that demanded us to trudge through with our water-filled boots.

Every moment seemed to blend, and the platoon and I were lost. The mission so far was quiet. No enemy contact, no signs of life, and most of all – no sign of Onoda. It was not until the third day, however, that the silence of the jungle would be broken.

On the evening of the third day, as we advanced into the winding forest and relocated to set up for new camp, Tadashi-san broke the silence and asked the question that even I wanted to ask.

I look at my compass facing full east. I noticed it had suffered a hairline crack.

“Lieutenant Rion,” he said, his voice in a rasp, “how do we even know that Onoda’s still alive?” He was leaning against a tree, wiping the sweat from his brow. His eyes looked hollow.

“He’s out there.” I answered stiffly. Though I said it more to assure myself.

Tadashi-san nodded, although his doubt only became more visible. I couldn’t blame him. We were hunting a shadow that felt like it was standing ahead of us.

We advanced into the belly of the jungle. Sunlight was barely getting through now, and the jungle became unsettlingly quiet.

Then, out of nowhere – it hit me. A sharp electric tension prickled along my skin. I stopped myself and raised a clenched fist to signal a halt to the rest, but before my order could even reach the back of the line, a shot tore through the air and into the body of a tree.

It was an ambush. We heard the gunfire before we even saw them – there must have been ten figures moving in and out of the trees. They fired loud cracks that pierced through the jungle.

“Fall back! Take Cover!” I shouted, my voice competing with the roar of bullets as we took cover behind a line of trees. I looked over to my platoon, but only saw Miyamoto-san.

Suddenly, I heard a loud scream echo throughout the forest.

“Tadashi-san! Fall back!” I ordered, but to no reply. I peeked out of my cover to find him. My eyes looking left and right and left again to scan the area quickly before falling back into cover. Not a sign.

“Tadashi-san’s gone,” said Miyamoto-san.

“We’re outnumbered, Lieutenant!” Miyamoto-san exclaimed. I agreed.

There was no other way out of this other than if we were to make a run for it. And so, Miyamoto-san and I ran, with the branches tearing through our uniforms, and eventually scratching through our skin. Our boots pounded on the earth as we raced to outpace death, itself.

We didn’t stop running until we heard the sound of gunfire fade away. My head started to hurt, and I felt the initial stages of a nausea episode. My breath came into ragged gasps as I tried to restabilize my heartbeat. I looked back to check if Miyamoto-san was okay.

He was not there.

“Miyamoto-san?” I called. I cried, hoping, praying, that he was only trailing a few clicks behind.

No answer. I was now alone.

The moment of realization hit. My comrades who had all trusted me and my loyalty to the mission – regardless of how hopeless – now gone. My breathing became heavy and uneasy. The guilt suddenly made my backpack ten times heavier.

But I had to keep moving forward. My mission – no matter how hopeless it may seem, was now all that remained.

I looked at my compass that was now due southeast. The glass, now like the shell of an egg about to crack.

I tucked it back into my pocket and marched for the hills.

That night, the jungle seemed more aggressive. The trees eventually closed around me like walls that have been inching shorter in width with every step I took. It was as if the gods designed this jungle as a prison for me.

I eventually set up camp beneath a fallen tree. The mediocre comfort provided by my pack and canteen were my only solace. The silence was thick, and I felt like I was the last person on earth.

I stared at the flame of my dying campfire, watching its pathetic attempt to light up the darkness that was swallowing me whole. For the first time, I began to think what if my men turned out to be right. If perhaps Onoda had actually died on Lubang that day, and we were chasing a myth – kept alive by fear, by the desperation to find purpose amidst this war.

My train of thought was broken by a sound of soft footsteps. I froze and slowly reached for my rifle.

“Miyamoto-san?” I whispered, though I knew it was impossible to be.

A shadow passed by the edge of the fire, but there was no one there. I was now seeing things that weren’t there. I could feel my grip on reality slipping away like sand through my fingers.

My sleep that night was substituted by visions – of Tadashi-san, of Miyamoto-san – calling my name, telling me to find the lighthouse and that all my questions would be answered there.

I woke up before the sun and immediately set foot, driven by my fallen comrades to find the lieutenant and bring him home, so I could go home as well.

Eventually, I caught sight of the lighthouse in the distance, and it was not long after when it loomed before me, a towering silhouette standing before me like a silent judge of my fate.

With sweaty palms, I nervously reached for the door handle. My heart was racing now. It clicked open. I was greeted by darkness, thick dust, and a spiral staircase that led all the way to the top.

I took each step with caution, my heavy heartbeat in sync with the creaking of the wooden floorboards. My mind was racing now. I looked up at how far I had left to climb, and the spiral staircase seemed to have gone on infinitely. Though I haven’t seen him yet, I could sense he was here – and each step that lead me closer to the top door led me deeper into his shadow.

As I took the last step up and faced the door, my sweat stuck my uniform onto my skin, and my vision became hazy. I reached for the knob – but it was locked. I put my ear up against the door and heard a murmur.

He was here.

Without another thought, I kicked the door open with my rifle at hand.

Across the room was a lamp, a makeshift bed... Miyamoto-san.

"Miyamoto-san? Is that really you? What are you doing here?" I asked, in shocking disbelief.

"I found Onoda, Lieutenant." Miyamoto-san said to me, calmly pointing at a man who I hadn't noticed until then. He was in a uniform similar to mine.

My focus shifted from Miyamoto-san to the man... no... to Hiro. I didn't bother thinking about how the hell Miyamoto-san was still alive and, on the lighthouse, because my mind was focused on retrieving the man that had put me through days that felt like an eternity of internal suffering. The man that cost the lives of my comrades.

I inched closer to him. His back was still turned against me. I set my rifle to my side and reached over to turn his shoulder around. My hand was now trembling intensely. My hand closed around the fabric of his shoulder, ready to turn him around out of eagerness to see his face – until I felt a old shock of glass.

I blinked and shook away the haziness that has been over my mind during the entire mission. I wasn't touching another man. I was touching the surface of a mirror, with my own reflection staring back at me with a haunted, thousand-yard stare.

I stumbled back, disoriented.

“Miyamoto-san!” I exclaimed, turning back to him. “Where is Hiro Onoda?!” Miyamoto-san didn’t answer. He only looked at me calmly and pointed back at the mirror.

I looked back at my own reflection. My pulse, now thundering, as I take the details that I had been ignoring – the worn uniform, the battle-scarred face, the haunted eyes. All mine. And then suddenly, the memory shot into mind.

The mission assigned to me by Taicho Fujita to capture *Lubang* port, days... no, months... no... years ago. The mission that I had failed, costing me the lives of my two comrades long ago. The way I retreated to the lighthouse and clung to orders long past, refusing to believe that my honor had been disintegrated long ago. My heart sank. Realizing it all froze me.

In a panic search for anything real, I look at my compass now due south. The glass – now shattered. Only shattered fragments on the side of its face now remain.

“I am Hiro,” I whispered. The words choked my throat. I refused to believe it. That my comrades Tadashi-san and Miyamoto-san weren’t lost in pursuit of Onoda, as they perished long ago when we tried to secure *Lubang*. They were merely ghosts... hallucinations... conjured by a mind that had refused to surrender his honor.

I looked where Miyamoto-san had been, but he was gone. I was left alone with my reflection – the one face that I had been trying to escape for so long. The one that I had been trying to rescue...

BEAR THE WEIGHT OF WHAT'S LOST.

To the dreamers, the thinkers, the makers, the rebels, and the yearners who made this zine come to life—thank you. We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who helped make this zine a reality: Mickey and Marc's Angels.

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And to the readers, the curious souls flipping through these pages—this zine is for all of you!