

2023 GEN CON WRITERS' SYMPOSIUM INAUGURAL IMAGE PROMPT CONTEST RESPONSES



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GRACE P. FONG
ARTIST WEBSITE

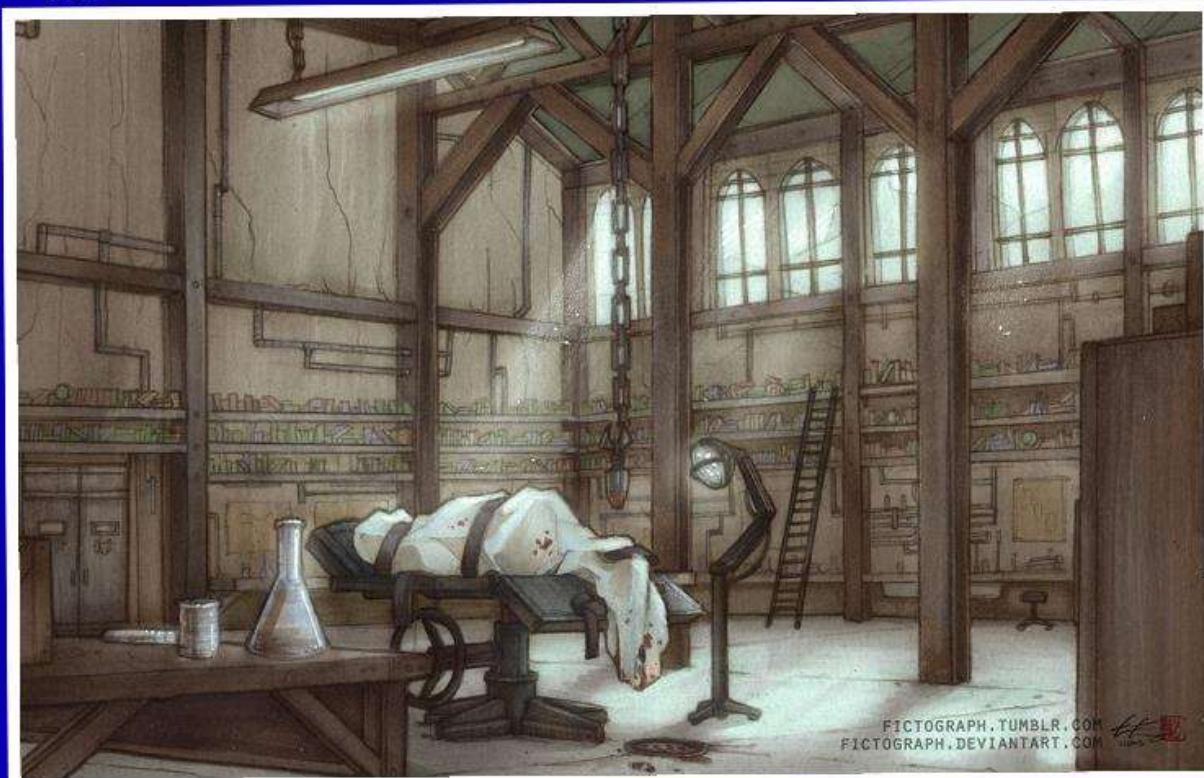
Artist Grace P. Fong
<https://gracepfong.com/>

Name	With 300words or less, describe the story you see! Provide a caption or mini-story.	ID
Karlis I Povisils	"Don't worry Princess. I'll 'sword' this out!"	A2
Krystal Norton	The knight only thought the princess needed saving. She took a deep breath and smiled as the princess held the blade against her throat. "Best two out of three?" The knight asked. "If you insist." The princess said, a true smile finally crossing her lips.	A3
Nate Andears	It's a funny story, actually. I was then a member of the Greensleeves. Yes, that Greensleeves, the less than legitimate mercenary outfit out of North Illia. At any rate, I was retained by an anonymous client with a job. The job was simple, track down a thief, retrieve the jewelry she absconded with, and kill her if necessary. Long story short, I didn't return the jewelry and didn't kill her. We've been married now for 12 years. The jewels were a nice dowry. Anyway, yeah, that's how we met.	A4
M M De Voe	"It's not how long it is, it's how dexterously you wield it."	A5
Melissa Reuter	<p>"Don't tell me I've caught the famed warrior off their guard?" Young Leader teased as they rested the well-used blade against Swift Warrior's shoulder. Gently, careful never to even provide a whisper of danger.</p> <p>"I know you don't have a clue what you're doing," Swift Warrior murmured, lifting the blade away and rising from their resting spot. "Will you ride with me today, Young Leader?"</p> <p>They rose as well, sharing a soft, sad smile with their oldest friend. "Duty calls, my favorite protector."</p> <p>Swift Warrior slid the curtain back to allow Young Leader to exit, lingering behind slightly to savor the last moment of that quiet time before the real world and duty intruded. When what was most important shifted from joy to purpose.</p> <p>Young Leader swung into action, doing then what they always did best. And they belonged to the people, not to the one.</p> <p>Swift Warrior's heart surged with pride, loyalty, and a fierce need to return, as always, to those treasured moments when it was only the morning. The silk. The steel.</p>	A6
Aly Murray	It was forbidden, the feelings overwhelming her mind, the love, the longing. It was cliché too, a princess falling for her bodyguard. But something about her, the way she took extra care, the extra concern, the stolen glances when they were alone. It was undeniable, wasn't it? Surely she felt that same way? Why was it always so hard to find the words when they were alone?	A7
Samantha Snyder	I slip through the silk curtains where my enemy sleeps and stalk towards her bed. The faint ring of steel slides through the air as I draw my sword, and the form under blankets does not move. Three more steps until I am there, ready to complete my mission. Then I am on my back on the floor, my sword deftly wrenched from my hands and turned upon me. The most stunning woman I've ever seen leans over me, a satisfied smirk upon her lips. "I thought you'd never come," she said.	A8
Hank Krutulis	<p>"I dub thee, Ser Gerenna," the grinning princess teased her decree as the blade clinked against the palace guard's pauldrons, "arise and serve thy charge."</p> <p>"You shouldn't joke like that, Hali," Renna managed earnestly in spite of the heat rushing to her cheeks. "Knighthood is serious."</p> <p>"I'm not joking," the smile vanished as the princess gathered herself to stand. Renna clambered upright, lest she be rolled out by the force of Hali's determined nobility, or rather, the dress train Renna lounged on.</p> <p>"Were I queen, then raising you to a knight would be the first thing I would do." Hali's eyes were tight, seeking Renna's understanding.</p> <p>A full second passed before Renna realized, mortified, that Hali still held her blade. Hali did so casually, with such grace that she had likely forgotten as well. Renna was treading new ground with her friend, and needed a fast retreat. "And what if there were kittens in a burning basket?"</p> <p>"What?" Hali lost her serious edge in a laugh.</p> <p>"At your coronation. Would you still knight me first before saving them?"</p> <p>The influence of Hali's smile returned to her features and she paused, leaning into the sword to ease the weight of her thought, "why would I ever need to? You'd be there. You'd likely have foreseen the situation, and separated the innocent kittens from any risk of flame already."</p> <p>Renna stepped over and placed a hand on the hilt of her sword. "And having protected these kittens from their end, I suppose I'd be all the more deserving of a title." She squeezed her friend's hand, and Hali let go.</p> <p>"My point exactly," Hali winked and spun out of the chamber, calling back "Off you go, guardsman. There are kittens to save."</p>	A9

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Jon darer	<p>The Lady knight placed the gleaming blade into cara's trembling hands and whispered "do as you will" and smiled. Cara pressed the blade unhindered into Lady's clean white neck, trembling, her breathing harsh and cheeks flushed. Lady slowly rose, her eyes locked in Cara's and leaned, without flinching, into the blade's edge. Cara leaned forward and sword in hand "I could kill you." and Lady responded "I you already have" and kissed her hard.</p> <p>Caption: "I could kill you" whispers Cara. Lady breathes "you already have".</p>	A10
Wesley Kirk	<p>As far as reasons to fight go, this one's just plain silly. In the adventurers' guild, the pair of strangers got into a heated debate on which wine was the best, and the best way to consume it. One lass was a proponent of a top shelf import, served at room temperature. The other was a champion of a local vintage, served slightly chilled.</p> <p>And the two fools somehow evolved their petty argument into the clashing of swords.</p> <p>The guild's bartender has, understandably, already cut them off.</p> <p>Though the fight itself has evolved over time. At first, as the rest of the patron adventurers were scrambling to get out of the way, it was a passionate contest of strength and fortitude. But, as the patrons turned into spectators and the fight dragged on, it became more nuanced.</p> <p>And the heat of the moment turned into other things as the pair actually started enjoying themselves.</p> <p>Throughout the clashing of steel, they bantered as they gave flourishing displays of their skill. Back and forth they go across the open area that normally functions as the rally point for parties before they embark on a quest. Stabbing, slashing, and making cutting remarks the whole way.</p> <p>All with growing smiles on their faces.</p> <p>With the two twirling around each other, the exchange metamorphosizes into a strange dance of sorts. But, the mood has changed. The spectators can't help but notice how the swordsmanship of the two young ladies seems to be almost flirtatious in nature. That the adventurers who flirt with death on regular intervals, are now speaking to each other with a language of singing steel. With scandalous intent.</p> <p>As they are still engaged in such thrilling conversation, the more heavily armored lass suddenly goes down. However, it's not from any blow from the golden haired victor. But, like any predator, she seized the moment and pounced, kneeling down and putting her sword on the long haired brunette's pauldron near her neck.</p> <p>The brunette smiles up at her and asks, "Intend to finish me now?" The victor leans down just a bit and smiles as she replies, "Thinking about it..." "What'd I even slip on? The floor was clear?" The two look over and see a thick glass cylinder that had skittered away after succeeding in felling the brunette.</p> <p>The golden haired swordswoman asks, "Isn't that one of the Guildmaster's potion bottles?" Both of their eyes suddenly jump wide open as they look over and see, sure enough, the master of the guild. And, judging by the random twitch of her left eyelid, she's none too pleased with what she's witnessed.</p> <p>The wrathful stare of their guildmaster doesn't cut nearly as sharply as when she finally speaks a single word. "...Ladies..."</p> <p>The brunette grabs the blade of the blonde and asks, rather sweetly, "Would you kindly stab me?"</p> <p>"If I'm going to hell, I'm taking you with me..."</p>	A11



IMAGE PROMPT CONTEST B



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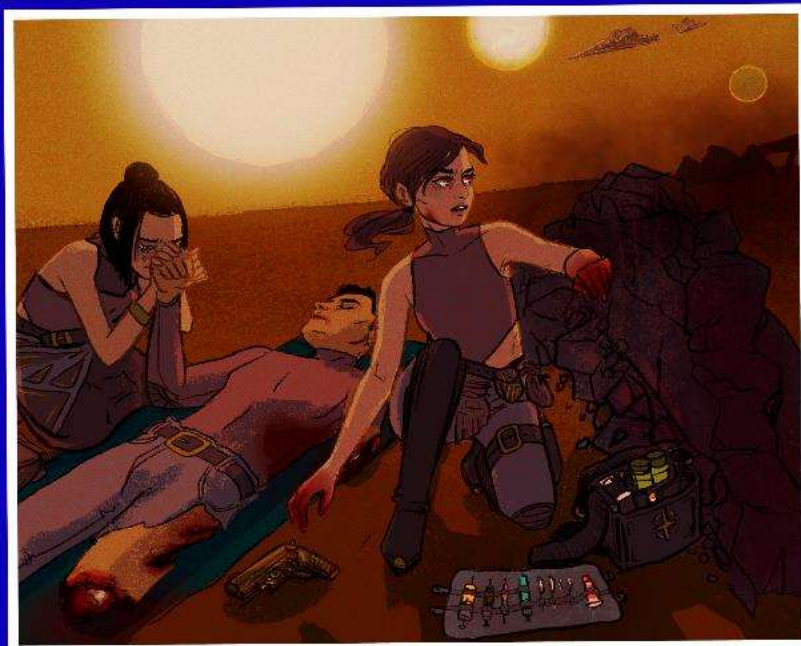
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Laura Shumate	The body beneath the shroud. Drip, drip, dripping its contents conveniently into the drain. But death is never convenient.	B12
Atalissa	It was the smell. It stung your nostrils, slide down into your lungs and festering, destroying the tissue. As the tissue degenerated a rattling wet cough would developed. You only had about two weeks left to live once the cough developed. Laboratory cleaners like Atalissa did not have much of a life expectancy. Sighing Atalissa hauled the body off the table on to the cart to take it to the incinerator. After 3 months of captivity, she never thought of the bodies as humans anymore.	B13
Krystal Norton	It was easier when the doctor was still alive. Sadly, he lost his life to his creations. His body was left on display as a reminder to those who sought to finish his work.	B14
M M De Voe	Blixar the Lamp always lived in the shade of his brother Pixar. Pixar always got all the attention, the movie deals, the laughs. The love. Blixar was nothing but a weird library lamp. But not anymore! With George Orwell ready for reanimation, Blixar's fame would be assured. George Orwell's mind in George Lucas' body. It was genius. The next three Star Wars movies would be epics again! And Orwellian space tales were perfect for an Apple TV miniseries... It would destroy Pixar. If only the Minions would hurry up with the kidnapping; there would finally be light and joy in Blixar's future....	B15
Bill Bleuel	None of the creature's ports were operational; indeed, the doctor had even added their own, all to no avail...	B16
Bryan Barnes	Dr. Jerimiah Lebeau dragged himself into the lab. The smell of chemicals and the morning light stabbing through the windows causing him to almost double over and retch. The smell of cheap bourbon still clung to him. There was no point in showering yet. He had to deal with last night's failure still and the clean-up always ruined what he was wearing. Jerimiah still could not understand why the procedure was not working. The answer was so close. "One more attempt." He promised the empty lab. "One more and I'll have it." At least new subjects were easy to find. The disease was an epidemic after all. What did it matter that his disposal pit was almost full again. "One more, this time it will work." He swore and began untying the straps on his latest failure.	B17
Tom Lawrynk	Can you believe it? The very first day of my new lab-assistant job, and I'm all alone! All the other new hires were too frightened to be here. Sure, it's somewhat creepy, but the clinician assured me that these procedures are both expected and necessary. And as long as I keep myself protected with these goggles, gloves, and my trusty black leather crane mask, I'll be fine. Don't get me wrong...I fully understand how devastating the Scentous Plague has been the past few months, especially in the region of Dwanten, but it isn't like the disease actually KILLS people or anything. From what I have heard, it infects and slowly eradicates the mind rather than the body, so any physical pain is quite minimal. Speaking of physical pain, my back and shoulders are extremely sore from all the repetitive work this morning. Maybe I'll mix up a tonic to relax prior to going home for the day... Well, by the look of the sunlight coming through those windows, it appears that my break is over. Time to get back to the the task at hand. Hmmm...that sheet is still faily unsoiled. I'm pretty good at this...if I say so myself! I just wish that the patient would refrain from gurgling and moaning so much every time I use the bone saw.	B18
Daphne Fauber	The students huddled around the outside of the room. Sweat seeped through their coats, their bodies shaking as they struggled to tear their eyes from the carcass strapped to the operating table. Their teacher, an old man built of sinew and gristle, creaked his procedures to the despairing crowd. "An axial slice to the costal cartilage." Crack. "An incision to the superior and inferior vena cava." Gush. "Separate the aorta." Rip. Each dictation a death rattle of the students' blissful ignorance they so desperately grasped at. The first procedure finished, the teacher held aloft a heart grey with rot, awarding the specimen to the closest student. She accepted the gift with shaking hands, nearly dropping it when the teacher spoke again. The hollowed cavity in his chest still dripped with offal, sprays of which now stained the leather straps binding his body. "To practice medicine, one cannot play Gods. One must become them," he croaked, selecting a cranial drill from his instruments. The students watched the procedure and the rest that followed, sure of one truth. The only higher power watching over the operating room was anguish.	B19

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Wesley Kirk	<p>Surgery is always a risky business. Even in the best of circumstances something can go wrong. How wrong? The patient losing everything, while the physician loses a patient, and a little piece of their soul in the process. But this wasn't 'the best of circumstances'. The patient question had been bitten, and the physician performed an emergency amputation in an attempt to save them. But, whether it was the infection from the bite, or other factors, the poor young man didn't make it. Which left the one attending to him in an unfortunate position as well. For, in medicine, you're supposed to work with detachment. Which is why you're never supposed to work on someone you know.</p> <p>But, they were desperate. Out of options. Out of time. So she did what she was trained to do: take action.</p> <p>Unfortunately, it wasn't enough. And, worst of all, she couldn't finish after he'd expired. Not so soon. It's too raw. Too painful.</p> <p>So she bound the lad as tightly as she could. Including wrapping him in multiple sheets and then rather roughly strapping the whole bundle down to the table.</p> <p>Just in case.</p> <p>For she has another task to complete. She failed to save him, but she can at least avenge him. The monster that caused his demise will meet its fate, at her hands. Tonight. She refuses to allow any other alternative to exist. Saving a life is hard. Taking one, no matter how foul and disgusting? That's easy. For her at least.</p> <p>Her only hope is that when she returns to her failure, she finds her husband's body exactly as she's left it. Resting peacefully. And not thrashing against it restrains like the undead monster she fears he'll become. But she won't know until she opens that particular door...</p>	B20
Danna Janz	<p>Francis stared between the fingers splayed across his face, unable to tear his eyes from the body of his wife, bloody and broken beneath the sheet he had hastily thrown atop her. His vain attempts to bring her back had resulted in jerking, unnatural movements, requiring him to strap her down. Sick to his stomach, he forced himself to stand, leaving Lillian behind to search for water to wet his throat.</p> <p>She had died during the birth of their first and only child, and his heartbreak had been immeasurable. There was nothing to be done for the baby, a cold and stony thing that had passed long before she had. He and Lillian had been trying to have this child for too long, and the lengths he had pushed her to were not worth this loss. His need to bring her back to him had driven him from their church and to the dark arts of necromancy, trying to stop her soul from passing through the Veil.</p> <p>Days later, all he had to show for his efforts was a graying body that was no longer the woman he'd loved. The light he had seen fade from her eyes never returned, and save the inanimate movements that had begun in the early hours of this day, no signs of life had returned to his beloved. Pulling himself together, Francis prepared himself for burying his wife, putting her to rest with their child, and resigning himself to join them.</p> <p>Walking into his laboratory once more, Francis stopped short. The sheet, meant to keep her grotesque appearance from disturbing him further, still lie on the table. The body, however, was gone. The straps were broken away on one side, and bloody footprints tracked to the door that led to the streets of Rome.</p>	B21
Christopher Tracy	<p>Gabriella stared at her father's body from the corner of the autopsy room, hearing her cries echoing off the room's emptiness that would seem odd, if not for the fact that she was told to stay as far away as possible. The infection could spread and she would join him. She wanted to see his face one last time, afraid that she would forget it and then forget him entirely. They sliced his leg, trying to bleed the sickness out but it took him, oblivious that tainted blood was draining onto the floor below. They struck the femoral artery and blood splashed into the surgeon's mouth. He was rushed off and is most likely being sliced open in a similar room with a similar echo. Maybe his child would soon be staring at him from the corner, wanting to hug him one last time. Her feet moved forward without her realizing and she stopped. She was told to stay away. He would want her to. But now, she was completely alone and no one could stop her. She moved the rest of the way towards him and pulled back the sheet. His face was kind, even in death. She almost felt she could just talk to him and he would smile. He would grab her hand, call her his "little Gab Gab", and they would laugh. Her cries echoed louder. For a moment, it felt like others were sharing her pain. She wasn't so alone. She wiped her eyes, not noticing the blood on her hand until it was too late. There was pain forming along with the sting of tears. She pulled the sheet back again and crawled up beside him, putting his arm around her. She would never be alone again. The echoes grew silent, granting their approval.</p>	B22



IMAGE PROMPT CONTEST C



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JILLIAN PORTER
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Artist Jillian Porter
<https://www.jillianporter.me/>

Name	With 300 words or less, describe the story you see! Provide a caption or mini-story.	ID
Jennifer Hankinson	<p>THE SUN SETS AT NOON</p> <p>Jacob is wounded and there's no shelter to protect us. How did we get here and why? "Snap out of it Sharlene" Greta hissed as she held onto Jacob's hand. "You need to finish bandaging his leg.." "I know!" I snapped back looking back into my bag, collecting the items needed. "I am doing the best I can.." I only a year one medic.. why was I chosen to go on this mission. The marching continues to grow louder and louder. We have wiped out 10,000 goblins already, how many more can there be. Where are they coming from? I work on wrapping Jacob's leg, his breath is too shallow, he is losing too much blood. "Greta, I don't think this.." I start to say "No! He will survive this, just wrap his leg" she hissed at me. I do as I'm told, I can't endure her wrath now with all we have to get done. I go to stand as an arrow hits the pile of rocks next to us. They are close.. too close. I look at Greta and Jacob. She is sobbing now, his chest isn't rising. I have failed them. "NOOOO..." Greta screams in agony, a loud piercing scream making my ears ring. She does it again as emotion starts rolling down her shoulders. The next one she does blows a blast wave so strong blasting me onto my ass. Silence.. no more marching, no more arrows. The sun begins to disappear. I look up to Greta with her teared filled eyes wide and glowing. The sun is gone and everything is black except for Greta's glowing eyes. Once she closes them, there is nothing to be seen. I feel everything start to spin again, I squeeze my eyes shut. A loud piercing scream demands my eyes to open. We are right back to were we started.. Jacob is wounded and there's no shelter to protect us. A vicious nightmare continues as soon as the sun sets at noon.</p>	C23
Atalissa	<p>The lower park of Quick's leg had been ripped clear off by the blaster. Bone was visible in the middle of the cauterized flesh and bone. Atalissa had the image of a bone in ham flash through her mind. She quickly squashed the thought wondering if she was losing her humanity or if it was just the effect of not eating for 2 days. War was hell.</p>	C24
Krystal	<p>The time to morn was lost as the dragon came back to finish them off.</p>	C25
Tim	<p>The ending of avatar the way of water before CGI</p>	C26
Ashley Bates	<p>Five minutes—that was all she needed. Thoughts of how it might be too late did not stop her from grabbing the serum to numb the torn nerves, from immediately shutting down the technomatic parts to prevent a short circuit. She knew that five minutes was too much to ask for. She barely been working for two before they showed up, the heavy armored running footsteps accompanied by the rip of fighters flying overhead. They needed backup, which would have been much easier to come by if half this base was not already dead.</p> <p>But it wasn't too late—not yet. She grabbed her gun from already bloodied hands, ignoring the premature mourning from behind. She focused only on the footsteps daring to come closer.</p> <p>If they were getting to her fallen patient, they'd have to go through her, first.</p>	C27

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Wesley Kirk	<p>When he left, he promised he'd be back. He had a duty to complete. And, beyond righteous service, it was for everyone's safety. Especially for his precious childhood friends on this small border-realm-outpost planet.</p> <p>On this backwater world, everyone learned from a young age to rely on themselves and their community. Outsiders rarely came to the area, unless they were wanting to cause trouble and had the mistaken impression that these hard working folks were pushovers of any caliber. And typically what happened, given the remoteness of his hometown, was that any help that might be needed wouldn't arrive until it was far too late to be of any point.</p> <p>Thus he signed up for service with the sector's defense ministry, got trained, and came back with his unit's equipment and personnel. Local folks could hold their own when needed, but, with organization and training, they became truly dangerous.</p> <p>When he left to fight off the approaching pirates, he promised he would be back, a promise he proudly kept.</p> <p>But, he also said everything was fine and he'd be okay. Both of which were, sadly, lies. And, as he lays sprawled out, bleeding heavily, they tearfully swear at him for his deception. Because he is neither fine nor okay.</p> <p>It's a miracle his small fighter made it back at all with how damaged it was. It simply flew apart during it's not so gentle landing. There was no explosion because he returned with little fuel, ammo depleted, and it was already barely holding together. But when the craft broke apart, it flung him away from the crash.</p> <p>Though none of them are sure where his leg went.</p> <p>But, even as injured, and barely clinging to life as he is, he knows his precious friends are safe. They'd won.</p> <p>Although he doesn't feel like he really deserved that slap. She'd kept going on and on about his missing leg. He simply reassured her in the best way he can with, "Hey, no worries, I have a spare."</p>	C28
Amanda Cook	<p>Rita sweated under the double suns as she worked to save Betsy's partner. They hadn't expected another attack from the silent ships in orbit above their settlement.</p> <p>It had been months since the last attack. There was supposed to be a signed treaty. Or, at least, that's what their regional leader had told them. But there they were, outside the high stone wall, every member of their tiny medical corps working to save the settlement's few soldiers, regrowing organs and limbs. Healing their fighters to fight another day for the far distant planetary alliance.</p> <p>Rita gave Betsy's partner a syringe full of regrowth serum and watched as his leg slowly lengthened from where the blaster had shot it off below the knee. There had to be a better way to live than this, she thought.</p> <p>And at the end of the day, she swore she was going to find it.</p>	C29



IMAGE PROMPT CONTEST D



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Name	With 300words or less, describe the story you see! Provide a caption or mini-story.	ID
Dominic Prior	I am an adept weaver of thread. I once made a tapestry to hang in the halls of the king. Granted it was a hall in the back, used mostly by servants, but it was still in the kings hall. I've made blankets, tapestries, bolts of fine cloth, I even wove the dress I am wearing with no need for seams or sewing. So why then is weaving magic so hard? It doesn't lay down obediently like thread. It doesn't even bunch and coil like wool. It's less like weaving and more like wrestling with snakes. Once placed it needs to be held down. Once tied, it wriggles and writhes. Oh what will I do?	D30
Attalissa	The tingles traveled up her arms as Attalisa concentrated on the red glowing gem floating in front of her. It was hard to believe she reached the spiritual level where she could judge the souls locked in the gems. This one gave off the blood red tinge of a murderer.	D31
M M De Voe	Thinking the Ruby Crystal of Time safe around her waist, Zhenda got busy trying to recreate her grandmother's cat's cradle game for her daughter when she felt a wintry chill hit her neck. It had to be Roggo the Assassin — she had heard he's been assigned to retrieve the stolen relic. She carefully passed the magic threads to the eight year old whispering, "Make jacob's ladder and climb up quickly." Dhasa was young but already knew her mother's danger voice. Later there would be a new statue to decorate. Dhasa wove the ladder and scampered up into her extra planar room, to wait for the screaming to stop.	D32
Krystal Norton	Love was a powerful force, but it wasn't as strong a grief. With a calm and empty head she pulled the strings of fate together just one more time. Tying his life back together so she could spend just one more day, one more moment, with him.	D33
Aly Murray	The red glow of the magic filled the room as she worked to overwrite the spell stored within the crystal. Careful, delicate work, requiring utmost focus. The original sorcerer was supremely powerful, concentric wards guarding this spell. She smirked, each ward falling in turn, her focus falling more and more into the crystal. So obsessed with beating him she did not hear the door creak open, did not hear the nearly silent footsteps, and did not feel the mage hunter's blade on her throat...	D34
Dave	"Eye of newt and hair of flea, torsioned now your ballsack be!"	D35
Aaron Peraza-Baker	Her fingers thrummed as the threads of her will made manifest held in place the tiny mote of power. A power Anne Marie knew to be terribly potent yet equally delicate. A power that was hers by birthright yet denied by a happenstance of birth order. The ancient glyphs along the torch glowed gently in response to her hovering captured ember. Second born or no she would light the ancestral torch and prove her worth.	D36
Wesley Kirk	The old saying goes "Curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought it back" typically gets shortened to "Curiosity killed the cat." In the current situation, where a would-be-clever observer sneaks his peek in at that which he should not have seen, the latter version of the idiom is far more accurate. For, to cross a fate spinner is to invite death itself with a forfeiture of your soul. And when the strings of fate are turned against you, they turn red. An easy feat to accomplish by a fate spinner who not only notices your trespass, but is rather annoyed by it.	D37
Danna Janz	<p>Standing alone in the dark, Solina stared at the convergence point where the strings looped around her fingers met, their criss-crossed mass a tangle she struggled to meld together. Her tutor, Father Diego, had told her of the forbidden craft, a skill she had to master but never use lest it be the downfall of her families hold on the Kingdom. Despite his frequent lessons, she had not seen the light that she had been told would appear as the strings forged at the point of concentration. In an effort to help her practice more, Father Diego had sent her back to her chambers with a staff he claimed would help to focus the power. By centering the point between the tines on the staff, she should be able to focus her innate power. So far, she felt it did nothing but take up space.</p> <p>Solina had been working at it for some time, her vision beginning to cross from the concentration on such a small point. The lids of her eyes began to drift shut, and as they did the room grew brighter. Snapping her them open, the light disappeared, and so she began to shut them again, relaxing her mind to recreate her state of mind before the momentary excitement of success. As she did so, she saw a bright red light begin to grow at the convergence point, glowing as if an ember from the fire. Keeping her eyes half-lidded, she focused on growing the light, pressing her mind into the strings and closing it to the rest of the space around her. In doing so, she did not hear the door as it began to creak open.</p>	D38