

TIDUS had noticed there was something different about Auron as soon as he had reappeared taking down those fiends in Luca, but the events after that had been disturbing enough to make him forget all about it. Finding out that there really was a connection between his father and Yuna's, and that Auron had somehow known them both, had been unnerving enough; discovering that Sin apparently had something to do with Jecht was more worrying still. He had chosen not to believe that one, but had remained gloomy until Yuna had coaxed him into performing that ridiculous laugh, and after that, he didn't have cause to be reminded of the strange change in Auron's behaviour until they began taking down fiends on the Highroad.

"What's with the arm?" he said at the end of one such battle.

Auron levelled an inscrutable gaze at him over his glasses. "Which arm?"

Tidus scowled. "You know which arm, smart guy. This one." He reached forward to prod it. "Don't think I ever actually saw you use it before. I thought it was broken or something."

"For ten years?" said Auron.

"Well, I dunno!" said Tidus. "Or it was ... dead, maybe – not like you ever told me –"

Auron began to laugh at that.

"Hey, what's the joke?" Tidus protested.

“Dead,” Auron echoed. “Never mind. No, it’s perfectly fine.” He tucked the arm back into his robe.

“So why d’you walk around like that, then?” said Tidus. “I can’t believe you used to do everything one-armed when you didn’t even have to. Watching you do the cooking with one hand and all that stuff – I almost felt sorry for you sometimes. Guess I shouldn’t have bothered.”

“Your help was appreciated,” said Auron.

Tidus considered. “Wait, is it like a Zanarkand and Spira thing? Cos you never used it there, but ...”

“I did use it in Zanarkand,” said Auron. “After I came to find you at the stadium, when we were driving off the sinspawn – you probably didn’t notice. Panic can do that.”

“Yeah, whatever,” said Tidus. “I wasn’t panicking.”

“You were,” said Auron bluntly. “If you must know ... it’s a tradition. A sign of dishonour.”

“Huh?” said Tidus.

Auron gave him a slow, one-eyed blink. “I had a duty to fulfil before I left Spira,” he said. “I failed in that duty. As penance ...” He gestured towards himself.

“But,” said Tidus thoughtfully, “Yuna’s dad became High Summoner, right? And you were his guardian? So the pilgrimage all went as planned, didn’t it?”

“The pilgrimage went as Braska planned,” Auron confirmed. “I had other ideas. Naive and foolish ones, but I dedicated myself to pursuing them.” His gaze flicked briefly

towards Yuna in the distance. “You may soon find that you have similar ideas of your own.”

“Huh?” said Tidus again. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You may discover,” said Auron, “that what *she* wants, and what *you* want, are incompatible.”

Tidus shrugged. “She wants to defeat Sin, right? Unless you mean cos it’s my – nah, Auron, I still don’t believe you. Sorry. Anyway, even if it was, you know I always hated the guy. I’m cool with it.”

“I don’t mean that,” said Auron. “You’ll see.”

Tidus watched as Auron hoisted his large sword onto his shoulder and walked away. He wondered if anything Auron said would ever make sense. It was probably sensible to assume it wouldn’t, he decided.