

Thirteen

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So this is how it all starts...They'll be more of these...I'm jumping around though, writing whatever scene comes to mind first, so they'll jump around a lot. I'll try to keep them in order, but spoilers are ahead. Click with caution.

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<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/flammingcorn/50245/Thirteen>

Chapter 1 - The Beginning

2

1 - The Beginning

"Thirteen! I'm going to give you such a beating!" Thirty-two yelled, cornering Thirteen. "How DARE you leave me to fight alone!"

"I couldn't help it, Thirty-two!" Thirteen said in his defense as he backed against the gray brick wall. "I'm no good at fighting! I would just slow you down!"

"You'll be lucky if you can even SEE tomorrow!" Thirty-two growled. "I'm gonna beat your eyes shut!" Thirteen knew that he was serious. Twenty-six still hadn't gotten over the fight that he and Thirty-two had had as kids, and that had been seven years ago. Thirty-two was the fiercest fighter of that territory, and was only surpassed by Thirty-seven, the leader of an opposing gang. He was thought to have no regard for human life, or any sense of remorse at all. Thirteen believed it...Desperate to get away, Thirteen ducked beneath Thirty-two's bony arm and ran.

Thirteen and Thirty-two were members of a gang. Not a well organized, crime wave kind of gang, but more like a pride of lions kind of gang. They lived in a country called Bartholomew, and in this country, humans behaved a lot more like animals, and treated each other as such. Danger was too prosperous to live by one's self here. To survive, people often lived in gangs, and helped to gather food and fight off any threats. In a gang, everyone was expected to do their part...

Thirteen's blue, ragged Chuck Taylors beat the pavement hard as he ran. He knew that he couldn't run forever, and that it also wasn't doing any good anyway. He would have to come back. Thirty-two probably wasn't even chasing him. Either way, he wanted as much distance as he could get between him and the aggressive, red-mohawked man.

As soon as he turned the corner, though, he ran into and was seized by a much larger and more threatening creature than Thirty-two that had been standing there. This person was a Prodigy. Prodigies, called so for their "superiority" amongst common Bartholians, were members of the Bartholomew secret police. At least they had the characteristics of other secret police known throughout history.

Bartholomew was ruled under a totalitarian dictatorship. Prodigies had every right to take someone away whenever they found it "necessary", and once taken, bad things often happened to that someone. The Prodigies were no secret though. They were always large men, unless they were fierce enough to make up for their size, and were always found parading around in groups of two or more. A Prodigy by himself was a Prodigy on a mission. They wore uniforms of gray, and were always shaved bald. Only the leaders were permitted to have hair.

Prodigies were a force to be reckoned with, as they were bred like dogs to be as powerful as humanly possible. Only the best males and females could apply to the need, and they were actually paid to SPAWN these horrible beasts. Of the many born, only a few selective offspring were chosen, and swiftly taken away to be brain-washed, trained, and even genetically enhanced through drugs to be built into the human tanks that patrolled the streets of Bartholomew. Ever-so-often, one who was not born a Prodigy, a common Bartholian, could become a Prodigy. Of course, that was only after they had proven their worth, often through a series of agonizing, torturous trials...

It was one of these monsters that seized Thirteen, and he knew that nothing good could come from it.

Before the Prodigy could rightfully take Thirteen away, however, he had to check Thirteen's number.

This was done by simply looking at a tattoo on the right side of Thirteen's lower back. Every Bartholian, even the Prodigies, had one according to his or her number. To not have one was illegal.

Pushing Thirteen face-first against the nearest wall, the Prodigy looked at the skinny seventeen-year-old's lower back. Sure enough, there was a "013" tattooed there. The Prodigy had found

what he had been looking for. Taking a little strand of though rope from his belt and tying Thirteen's wrists tightly together, he lead the poor boy away.

Numbers like the one on Thirteen's back were very important in the country of Bartholomew. A number was a person's entire identity. Not only did everyone have one, but nobody had the same number. This was made sure of through a carefully organized and well thought out system. One was given a number at birth. This number then stuck with that person throughout his or her entire life. No other child in that person's lifetime recieved that number. Once that person died, however, the number transferred over to the child being born closest to the first person's death. Then the cycle would start all over again. There were a few minor problems with the system, but there were many, cleverly thought out and complicated ways of settling them.

Thirteen and everyone he knew were "tri's", or, people with only three digits in there tattoo. By default, all Bartholians were tri's; unless they had a larger number; for every number started with two zeros, then one, then eventually none. Further on, where Thirteen was sure he could not travel alone without being killed, he knew that there were quads and quints. Further than that carried people with even larger numbers. He was sure that their tattoos must have been painfull ones...

Other people were not on Thirteen's mind at the moment though. It just so happened that he was locked up tight in a holding cell. Pretty much any cell in Bartholomew was a holding cell. This was because no one had time to look after prisoners. If found guilty, a Bartholian citizen would recieve a swift and usually very painful and/or humiliating punishment...cruel and unusual meant nothing to them...Thirteen was now awaiting his trial; not that anyone could really call it that. A Bartholian trial was done immediately after the arrest. The only judge and jury was the dictator of Bartholomew. Prodigies, or whoever was accusing someone of a crime, brought "proof" and told his or her side of the story. The accused then had a chance to defend themselves with their version of it all, and what proof he or she could come up with on short notice. The dictator then judged the accused person right then and there. More often than not, the accused was found guilty, and then sentenced right there on the spot.

As he knew would happen, a Prodigy came to take Thirteen before Lord Brom, the dictator ruler of Bartholomew at the time. The ropes around his wrists were replaced with heavy chains and a padlock. Around his neck, the Prodigy locked a huge, neck-brace-like shackle with chains on either side of it. The Prodigy then took one chain, while another Prodigy took the other. They then led him to the court room. They chained him in what was known as the "accused box", which was a boxed area in the middle of the court room with two poles on either side of it for the neck chains to be attached to. Lord Brom wasn't present yet. Thirteen stood (not that he really had the choice of a seat), waiting in fear. He didn't know what he was accused of, but he was aware of committing a crime. He knew that he deserved a punishment. However, he preffered that he be punished for his crime, and not a different one...especially one with a higher consequence.

That's when Lord Brom entered the room. He was a tall, thin man with long white hair and a sunken, skull-like face. He wore his usual suit of navy blue. A cold expression was on his thin face as he seated himself at the podium. Thirteen felt as though he were going to pass out as Lord Brom pierced him with that cold gaze. Nothing struck fear into the heart of a Bartholian more than the fierce look of Lord Brom. Even the defiant Thirty-two was frightened of it...

"Ah, yes, Thirteen," Lord Brom said with a sneer. "You've been in here before, haven't you?"

"Yes, Lord Brom," Thirteen said in a scared voice. He was horrible at hiding his emotions. "I have...You sentenced me to two days in a pillory..."

"So why is it that you are back?" Lord Brom asked. "A glutton for punishment, are you? Perhaps you did not learn from the first time?"

"I'm not even fully aware of the charges..." Thirteen answered him shakily, hanging his head.

"You've been charged with vandalism again," Lord Brom said . "You just so happen to be a very gifted

artist, Thirteen. It's ashame that you use these talents for wrong doing...Graffiti is, in fact, illegal."

"I'm aware of that. In that case," Thirteen said, his morality forcing him to confess, "I didn't think that I'd get caught twice. Many people graffiti the same..."

"Thirteen! I'm surprised at you," Lord Brom said. "Certainly, as an artist yourself, you MUST know that every artist has his or her own unique style, however similar they may be."

Defeating and dreading what was to come, Thirteen said sadly, "Then I suppose that I should quit..."

"A wise decision," Lord Brom said coldly. "Unfortunately, it will not spare you of your punishment. Since the pillory did not teach you, I shall have to try a different technique. You, number Thirteen, are sentenced to ten lashes to your bare back!"

He slammed the gavel down with a horrible echo throughout the big, nearly-empty court room. Thirteen gulped. Never in his life had he felt the sting of the dreaded whip before. It was a common practice, and nearly every Bartholian had to experience it once in his life...Thirteen had watched many suffer its fate, and knew that it was a terribly painful experience. Fear rose up in his heart...

TO BE CONTINUED...