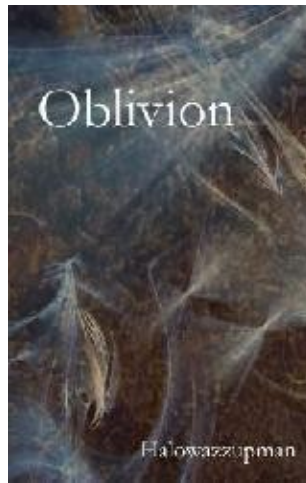


# Oblivion - A Short Story

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Nothing. There was nothing.



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# Oblivion - A Short Story

## Oblivion

Nothing. There was nothing.

Then, the faintest pinprick of light. Slowly, I opened my eyes and saw the sky. It was faintly lit. Dawn! Or dusk.

A throbbing in my leg turned my attention down. My left leg was bent in a way I was sure it was not supposed to bend. It was broken. Looking down, I could also see that I was lying on something soft and grey. Ashes.

I tried to recall how I had gotten there, but I didn't know. Only one thing came to me. Arkadius. My name? Other than that, it didn't seem I had any other memories.

Now that I thought about it, where was I here?

To the left was an extensive pine forest. Upward was a bit of a clearing with more forest beyond it, while looking down I could see a river cutting through the landscape and going on to pass through a grate past a wall. That led me to the more interesting part of my surroundings. On my right was a wall made of rocks and metals, patched together perfectly so there were no gaps and would be almost impossible to climb. It stretched on for a long distance in both directions. I was surprised there were no guards on it, patrolling; it was probably quite a big city.

I was about to shout out for help when I realized that I might have just been sent here to die by those exact people. If that was true, it was probably dusk. If it was dusk, then the animals would probably be coming out soon.

I lay there for a while considering my options. I could stay silent and risk animals. I could shout out and risk animals and enemies. Or I could try to move.

I chose the third option and immediately regretted it. Pain speared through me, bursting through my leg and bringing back the blackness that threatened to consume me. It took all my willpower not to cry out and stay awake.

I continued to lie there, shaking with pain as it slowly receded. Time passed and nothing moved. There was no wind, nothing rustling through the forest and no one on the wall. Finally, I noticed that the sky was gradually becoming lighter. It was dawn.

Still, nothing moved and I began to consider my last option. Shouting out for help. I figured I wouldn't be able to project my voice far enough while laying down, so I gritted my teeth and pushed myself into an upright sitting position. Again, pain exploded in my leg, but I managed to steady myself and find a position that my leg could handle.

Once the threat of unconsciousness receded, I took a deep breath and shouted, "Help!"

Time passed and still nothing moved. I was about to call again when I heard something moving in the forest. Immediately my mind jumped to wild animals and I sighed. As long as it was quick. I didn't have anything to live for anyway - at least, not that I could remember.

## Oblivion - A Short Story

I waited for it to come up and eat me but nothing came. My heart stopped racing eventually, and I decided to shout again. "Help!"

This time there was movement from my other side. My saviour or my killer was arriving. His head appeared over the tall wall and frowned. Then it disappeared and I got the feeling he was coming down toward me.

His frown worried me. Maybe he was just worried about my leg, but I would have bet anything on him knowing me and coming to kill me.

Time seemed to drag out forever as I waited for him to arrive. I was either safe or dead, and I was about to find out.

Finally, I saw him approaching from the wall and I held my breath. He didn't look armed. The man stopped at the edge of the circle of ashes that surrounded me and asked, "Aren't you supposed to be dead?"

Well, this was it I thought. I was about to die. "Am I?" I replied.

"It certainly looks like it, though I don't see why. The only thing wrong I can see is your leg."

It didn't seem like he wanted to kill me. "Are you going to help me up then or what?" I took a chance.

The man looked around and then shrugged, stepped into the circle and helped me up. "I'm Seth," he told me.

"I'm Arkadius," I think, I replied.

He looked at me strangely as he helped me limp toward the wall. "You think?" Seth asked.

"That's the only thing I remember," I told him.

"So you don't remember how you got the honour of being sent up to empyrean like that?"

"What's empyrean?"

"The highest level of heaven. You must have done something really special in life to deserve that. And since you're still alive..."

I got what he was getting at. I was still alive. Either someone had thought I was dead or had hoped so.

We fell into an uncomfortable silence for a few minutes. The wall slowly got nearer and I began to realize just how big it really was. Before I had been looking at just the top section, as the bottom had been hidden by a hill. Now I could see that it was about three times taller. As we got nearer it, it also seemed to stretch farther in both ways.

It should be loud inside these walls, I thought, it must be a huge city. But the silence continued. "What is this place?" I questioned.

"Our town is called Kavelia," Seth told me. He seemed to be taking in my amnesia very well.

"It's in the province of Iqarion." I must have still looked dumbfounded because he added,

## Oblivion - A Short Story

“ Iqarion is in the kingdom of Eldaron. There’s more kingdoms that split up the world between them.”

I nodded. We were nearing a gate in the wall and I lapsed into silence again, Seth following my example.

Looking at Seth, I could see that he was about the same height as me, with dark hair and sandy yellow coloured eyes. He had an angular face and a square build.

That was when I realized that I didn’t even know how I looked. I felt slightly thin next to Seth, but I had no real idea of how my face looked. It was a disconcerting feeling. I promised myself to look in a mirror as soon as I could.

Finally, we reached the gate and Seth knocked with his free hand. A hatch opened in the door and a brown eye looked through.

“ Oh, it’s you,” a gruff voice said, “ Come in.”

A small hatch opened in the metal gate and I could see a small portly man standing just inside the wall.

“ Who’s he?” the man asked.

Seth replied, “ Arkadius, this is Gregor, our gate keeper.”

Gregor moved out of the way and Seth helped me into Kavelia. I kept my eyes on Gregor and he kept his eyes on me. Now that I was saved I was beginning to feel like I didn’t want everyone to know I was there, but I nodded to him and he replied with the same curt nod. Seth and I continued down the well worn dirt path to the town, which I could now see.

Just inside the town wall were many farms, all growing something different, including wheat, barley, canola, orchards of different trees and even one farm growing a myriad of different flowers. Inside the rings of farms were a few ranches, some flour mills with waterwheels using the river that passed through the town for power, and some park, where I could see a few couples were enjoying their morning walks. Finally, in the middle of it all was the actual town.

Built of stone and metal, each house seemed to reflect something about its owner. Each house was different, built with its own style and each was built to accommodate certain people and perform certain tasks. With each house being quite different and being of a different size, almost none of the streets were straight except the two main roads and this created a chaotic feel to the town.

Nearing the town, I began to grow apprehensive of more contact with other humans. Seth was nice, Gregor had been just a passing face, but I wasn’t sure how I would handle more than three people at once. Hopefully I wouldn’t have that problem until I could leave normally on my own. And that would require having two fully functioning legs.

So for now I was stuck with one option. Go wherever Seth took me and heal my leg up.

We continued on our way, now reaching the actual town of Kavelia and stopping in between the first two buildings.

“ Our hospital is close to the centre of the town, but we’re almost there anyway,” Seth laughed.

## Oblivion - A Short Story

I smiled, more because of the fact that we were almost there than because of his joke. "That's good," I replied.

The hospital was a small mainly metal building set just off the town square. It looked very blank from the outside, except for the red plus sign on top of the flat roof.

Inside, there was a waiting room with five chairs and a desk. Beside the desk was a door. As we came in, a bell rang and a woman came in through the door. She took one look at my leg and immediately ushered us through the door into a quite short hallway with three doors along each side - six rooms in total.

The woman led us through into the second room on the left side and led me to the bed, finally letting me lay down and giving Seth a much needed break.

As I lay there, my eyes slowly closed and then I was asleep.

When I opened my eyes, everything took a while to focus. The first thing I realized was that the throbbing pain in my leg was gone. They had probably put it back in place while I was unconscious. The next thing I noticed was that I was being watched.

I turned my head to the right and saw the nurse standing by the door. Now that I got to see her clearly and still, I could see that she was of average height and looked quite thin. She had long brown hair and sparkling green eyes.

She smiled. "Oh, you're finally awake."

I nodded.

"I'm Natasha, the nurse of Kavelia," she said in a silky voice, "We've put your leg back in place and Brent, our doctor, will be here in a second to tell you what will happen over the next few weeks." With that, Natasha left the room and I was alone again.

While I was alone there was only one thing I could turn my mind to, and that was in on itself. I tried searching for memories, but I couldn't find any. It was as if someone had taken them out and left me with nothing. Then again, maybe that was what had actually happened.

Brent came into the room. He was of average height and had a slight potbelly. He had messy blonde hair and a bright smile to match his bright blue eyes. He cleared his throat, then said, "Well, we put your leg back in place and it will be starting to heal. We're going to keep you here for a few weeks, probably two, before we make any decisions, but after that we should be able to let you out on crutches. After six or so weeks you should be good! Any questions?" Brent asked.

I shook my head.

"Good!" He smiled and left the room.

Back to the company of myself it was.

The next two weeks were slow and boring, and I spent most of my time sleeping. Seth would appear from time to time and I talked to him a bit. I talked to Natasha too, who would bring me food and just come around every now and then. Brent came in once every three or four days to look at my leg and assess how it was healing. At the end of two weeks, he told me it would just be two more days and once these two days were up,

## Oblivion - A Short Story

he and Natasha helped me up and gave me crutches which I would use for at least the next four weeks.

Seth waited for me in the waiting room and led me out of the hospital onto the streets of Kavelia. There were a few people, going around doing business and most greeted Seth as they passed. Seth led me through the town to his house, where I would be spending the next four weeks.

Over those weeks, Seth showed me the town, introduced me to the its inhabitants, and spent a lot of time with me. When I asked him if he had a job, he told me that the town worked by giving and that he would get food and any help he needed as long as he did his duty when the time came. For Seth, that duty was protecting the town. He would guard the walls and fight to keep the town safe. Throughout the time I spent with him, I learnt a lot about Seth and I think we became fairly good friends, though there was nothing he could learn about me, so it was a bit of a lopsided friendship.

One thing I learnt about myself and didnât tell Seth for a long time was that I had a symbol carved into the underside of my arm. It was and â Hâ written in arrows, with smaller, seemingly random symbols surrounding it. When I first found it, I kept it to myself, but I realized that it might help Seth figure out something about my past, so eventually, when he realized that I was holding something back, I showed him.

After he drew as close a copy of it as he could and showed it to a few people, the librarian, Roberta Jook, showed him some books that might contain it, and from there we searched.

It was three weeks after I had left the hospital and I was starting to give up on finding my past and thinking about trying to just start anew here in Kavelia when Seth recognized the symbol in an old map. Seth found the place where Kavelia was and traced a path through a few towns to the place the symbol signified. Beside the symbol a word was written: Heidell.

That became our destination and, from then on, all we searched for were books that could say anything about it. It was easy to find information on it, but the problem was that almost all of the information said the same thing. It was a small town shrouded in mystery that no one dared visit. That news wasnât exactly uplifting. Few books said more and all that did either spoke in riddles, changed languages, or said a useless fact, like the possible population of Heidell.

Two days before my leg was given the â all-clearâ, Seth got me a sword at the armory, which was run by a buff man named Felix. The sword was made of a light, but durable metal named titanium. It also had the possibility of swinging open and making a double sided sword with thinner blades.

Seth took this as a mere precaution in the case of having to fight some highwayman on our way to Heidell, but somehow I had a feeling that I would need this sword and having it gave me a lot of confidence about going to Heidell. Once my leg was completely healed, Seth and I decided to stay in Kavelia for five more days before going off to Heidell. Seth said heâd go with me to see the end of this story and know what had happened in case I didnât come back. Besides, I was still a bit shaky on two foot and my fighting skills werenât that good at all.

Over those five days, we trained, tried to research more and gathered supplies for the trip. Seth estimated a four day trip to get there by foot so we would each be carrying a bit of the supplies.

On the sixth day, Seth said goodbye to everyone while I awkwardly nodded. Then we were off, out the city gates - still opened and closed by Gregor - and walking southwest.

The first day was uneventful and we made a good distance. For the night, we set up camp just off of the path and woke the next morning with nothing out of the ordinary. This trip, so far, had been quite boring and only

## Oblivion - A Short Story

my want to know what Iâd find out at the end kept me going.

The second day was also uneventful and the second night came and went without any incidents. Then came the third day.

I first became aware of something being wrong at about noon. There were shadows in the trees following us. From time to time, a branch would snap and I kept my hand near the hilt of my sword the whole time. Eventually the things that had been following us disappeared and I released. That was my first mistake.

As we walked around a corner, we saw a figure on a horse standing in the middle of the path, seemingly waiting for us. At the slightest nod, we were surrounded. Men exited the tree line that ran alongside both sides of the path.

Seth turned around so we were back to back with me facing the man. Leaving my hands open to show peace I shouted, âWhat do you want?â Those were mistakes two and three.

The man signalled and one of the men encircling us drew his crossbow and aimed it at me.

Before he could fire, however, Seth drew his crossbow and shot the man in the neck, killing him instantly.

Other men in the circle surrounding us drew their weapons, but the leader raised his hand to stop them. âYou have killed one of our men, so I give you two choices. One is to join us and let us kill your friend, or to sacrifice yourself and let him go free.â

âAnd who are you to give me such offers?â Seth asked.

âI am the essence of Arcturus Gilian, attached to this body. Each of those who follow me have felt my touch and joined me. Maybe youâll be the first to not have to go to such lengths.â Arcturus smirked.

I thought about that name, Arcturus Gilian, and something snapped into place in my mind. My memories did not come back, but something did come together and I immediately knew we were going the right way. I had had a past with Arcturus, but he was not our goal. He was just part of the story.

But to find out the rest of the story, Seth and I would have to live, and right now, the chances of both of us living were quite small. All the same, Seth reloaded his bow as I took out my sword.

Arcturus laughed. âFighting I see. Many have tried that. None have succeeded.â With an unseen order, his men started to converge on us. Seth killed on with his crossbow before they got too close, then dropped his bow and pulled out his sword. He didnât have any fancy capabilities, but he had spent much longer with it and could fight really well.

I did a quick count of the people coming at us. There was twelve of them. I kept my sword one-sided for now - I could probably use the surprise later - and parried an attack from the man in front of me, then slid my sword underneath his in a jab.

Another sword came from the side and I dodged it, attacking back and knocking his sword away.

Two more swords came at me and I blocked one, ducking underneath the other swing. I then split my sword and took out the second attacker, pushing back the first.

## Oblivion - A Short Story

Another man came in from my right again, filling the place where the man I had just killed had been. He tried to swing, but I blocked it with the second blade of my sword, and the three of us stood there in a deadlock for a second until I broke off and ducked.

The second man's swing went in a wide arc and hit the other attacker, allowing me to jump in and kill both. At maximum, eight people more left and I was sure Seth had gotten rid of some. Using the short break I had, I quickly turned my head around and counted four attackers still standing. They were all standing back a bit, and I realized that Arcturus must have issued a command to make them stay there.

"Ah, you have fought bravely, but now let's see how good your mental combat skills are."

Suddenly, I felt a push at my consciousness, as if my being was being pushed away from my body, and it felt strangely familiar. My mind reacted by itself and attacked back fiercely. Arcturus in turn attacked more strongly, and I started to lose myself, but pushed back and our fight raged on, like two walls shoving each other for control of my body. Then, the intruder disappeared and I realized I had my eyes closed and my fists clenched. I opened my eyes to see Arcturus retreating into the forest.

I picked up my sword - which I must have dropped - returned it to its normal form and sheathed it. I then looked at Seth, who looked worried and told him, "I'm fine, but I don't know why he backed off. If we had kept fighting, he would have won."

"Fighting?" Seth asked.

I shrugged. "It's as if he was trying to invade my consciousness, but my mind sort of tried to fight him off by itself. It's as if my mind had that natural reflex, but it felt as if it had happened before, or at least something like that happened. Which means Arcturus is part of this."

"Then we'd probably go ahead and hurry up. He might also be going - or returning - to Heidell."

For the rest of the day, we continued to walk and talk about who Arcturus could have been. By looks, he looked like he could be my older cousin or a younger uncle, but he had said that it was just the essence of Arcturus attached to the body. But something - his mind? - had felt familiar, so we were attached in some way.

The next day we made more uninterrupted progress, though we kept talking and thinking about the mystery that my past was. Finally, quite early in the day, we reached the gates of Heidell, which appeared to be a giant mansion, built completely out of dark grey stone.

The mansion was shaped like an old castle, with turrets and spires, great door and stained glass windows.

The front gate stood slightly open and we slipped in. The bright daylight took away the point of sneaking, so we walked casually up the pathway leading to the front door. The lawn was rough and unkempt, with weeds starting to choke the field at the edges. It gave the impression of a recently abandoned haunted mansion. And we were walking straight to it.

The main doors were closed, but unlocked, and we stepped inside, our steps echoing through the silent building. Most of the windows were closed and blocked off, so only a few lines of light made it into the building, and though it was day, the mansion was dark as night. All seemed still, and I felt quite out of place, though my subconscious felt like this was the right place.

"Is this?" Seth trailed off on his whisper. He, like me, didn't want to disturb the quiet of this place.



## Oblivion - A Short Story

I nodded, then led him down a hallway to the left, following my subconscious mind and trusting that it would lead me somewhere where we could get answers.

The hallway was fairly long, with doors placed irregularly along the sides. There were torches in brackets along the walls, providing an eerie, flickering glow.

We walked down and came to a stop at a door farther down the right side, which I opened and revealed stairs leading down to what was probably a basement of some sort. Maybe there would be scrolls there telling of what happened? I tried not to lift my hopes up though; that would be far too easy.

With me in the lead, we descended down the stairs, eventually reaching a door or - at least - what had once been a door. There was a pile of wood in the door frame that looked as if it had been ripped apart. A door knocker lay with the rubble, the face of a bear looking menacingly up at us. It seemed to be an omen of things to come.

I stepped cautiously over the ruined door and into the room, bracing myself for an attack. I didn't want to be caught off-guard, especially with whatever tore down that door possibly close by. But all was still and nothing jumped at us. I released the hilt of my sword and scanned the room.

It looked like a laboratory of some sort, with cages along one wall and tubes connecting all of them to what looked like it was once a central control, but was now a small crater in the ground with random pieces of metal or glass scattered across the room.

Suddenly, I heard movement from the door. I whipped around and half-unsheathed my sword to see Arcturus Gillan standing there, leaning against the wall.

â I see you have found that fateful place of more questions than answers, Arkadius,â he said.

â How do you know my name?â I asked, unsheathing my sword the whole way now, â And why shouldn't I kill you right here and now?â

â Because you wouldn't kill your own brother, now would you?â

That took a little while to sink in. â But yet you tried to kill me?â I retaliated.

â I didn't know it was you,â he told me, â And didn't think you were still alive. Besides, I never tried to kill you.â

â Ordering people to kill us is the same.â

â I never did that either. Look at your sword, is there any blood? No. These people were illusions. I created them to test your skills, to see if I could assimilate them.â

â To what?â

â To copy them into my memory so I would be more protected when the time came for the hunt. But, of course, you fought me off. And I could sense that it was you. So I left and watched you. I watched to see if you could remember Heidell. As I can see, you remembered.â

I shook my head. â I can't remember anything. The thing that brought me here was this.â I showed Arcturus the scar on my arm.

## Oblivion - A Short Story

He nodded. "Well you came here anyway, and that's what matters."

"But what is here?" I asked.

"It would probably be easier to just start from the beginning and tell you the whole story," he explained, "I presume you've realized that I am your brother by now. I was born two years earlier and had two years with mother before she died giving birth to you. So we grew up with Ignatius - father - and each other. Father was a scientist. He would do all kinds of crazy experiments using the minds of animals and stuff. Once he was sure it worked, he would hire a human to test it on, and if it worked he sold it. This was his laboratory. Eventually, he grew old and developed a way to transfer his knowledge to us, but it backfired. One of his memories escaped, while the rest transferred to me, apparently, along with your memories. The memory that escaped needed a host, and tried my body, but with the recent transfer, I fought back and all the energy release incinerated my body, along with father. The outcast memory came at you and knocked you out. I used your body to find others and found our uncle. I assimilated into his body and left you outside a nearby town's wall, believing you to be dead. I then went back to search for the memory, but found that it had most likely stayed with you. I came back to see that you had awoken and were being taken into the town. You had a broken leg, which possibly signified an energy release - the memory might have left. But then, when I touched your mind to assimilate your skills, I felt it back there. And then I knew, it had stayed with you."

Many questions sprung to my mind, but I chose one to ask first. "What was the memory? And why and how did it escape?"

"The reason it escaped was because it was not just a memory, but the memory of an essence. It is literally a copy of a person's essence, just like I have the essence of father in my memories. You have the essence of mother."

My eyes widened in surprise, but I kept with the questions. "How do you search for a memory?"

"By extending your mentality to your surroundings to see if it has attached to anything."

I had another question. "How long was I out for?"

"About ten days, but most of that time you were not by the town wall."

And then I had just one more question. "Is there any way to get my memories back?"

Arcturus shook his head. "You'll have to start anew."

I nodded. Then I looked at Seth and Arcturus, and started to leave Heidell. If I was going to start anew, it would be in a place that held no memories, even if I did not possess those memories.

And when we came back to Kavelia, the ashes were gone.

## Oblivion - A Short Story

## Oblivion - A Short Story

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