

# Birthdays are Made for Memories

## The 10kd 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Special

by James Wylder

Graelyn hung the string of lights up and stood back to admire her handiwork.

"Wow," Graelyn said, "it looks like shit."

Arch sighed, "It's not too bad, it's certainly the best possible look under the circumstances."

He was right, not that she wanted to admit it right now, as she avoided scratching her face. This was the worst place she could have gotten dropped on a mission, only to get involved in a wild chase that resulted in her satchel of the crystal dust that allowed her to travel between alternate realities dropping into a precipice. And then, of course, it had turned out there was a plague here, and even after they got in touch with Spiral, they had to quarantine themselves.

"You know, I'd had bigger plans for my birthday this year," Graelyn said.

"You don't even know how old you are, I mean, didn't you get turned into a baby that one time and have to redo your entire--"

"Hush. I'm serious."

She flopped down on the couch in the house they'd rented, and groaned. "Look, I've never had a good birthday. Something bad always happens, so this year I decided I was going to make it a good birthday no matter what. No unexpected breakups, or familial abuse, or gaslighting or--"

--I feel like this is a very low bar--"

"And...just spend it with all the friends I've made."

Arch nodded, he could get that, as much as he really could. Neither of them had particularly minded being quarantined, they had both spent a long time alone in their lives. But looking at Graelyn staring up at the ceiling, he began to realize exactly how not-alone they'd both become.

It hadn't been so long ago that Archimedes was alone on Ahnerabe Station, thinking he'd spend the rest of his life alone and adrift. It wasn't so long ago for her that Graelyn had pushed the whole world away because of her hellish upbringing, and had given certainty to a life of solitude.

Even being quarantined together with his friend was twice as much human contact per day than he'd expected out of his life.

So Arch put his processors and brain cells to work, and began to formulate a plan.

\* \* \*

Let's look outside the building, shall we? Whole world, big plague, you know the deal. The streets are empty, aside from one figure hiding behind a tree. They peer at the rented house, and begin to sneak towards it. Over their shoulder is a bag: Graelyn's bag.

\* \* \*

Arch of course, heard the door unlock. He had exceptional hearing, being that it was literally just high end microphones and vibration sensors. So when the person tried to sneak in, the attempt was thwarted fairly quickly, as they got halfway into the kitchen to find Arch sliding in behind them to block their exit, and Graelyn, with Face-mask, standing in front of them with her hands on her hips.

"Did you really think you were breaking into my house? On my birthday?"

"It's not actually our house, it is a rental," Arch said.

"Not the most important detail I think. Now who are you?"

The man reached for his own face-mask, and Graelyn and Arch both threw up their hands, "No no no!"

"You can keep that on, we don't need to see your face."

The man still pulled his mask down, and Graelyn and Arch threw their hands up in disgust, "Really?" Graelyn said, "What was the point of that, I can hear you just fine through the mask."

The man's face went red, "Don't you know who I am?"

Graelyn shook her head.

"I'm the one who should have had your adventures! You thieving girl."

"...What?" Graelyn said, blankly.

"I'm Elliott Jo Jordan. I was the top candidate for Project Atlantis' intern position, but you somehow got it instead! I should have been the one traveling between alternate realities--"

"Uh, hate to bring this up but to be here you had to have literally traveled between alternate realities..." Arch noted.

He spun around to point a finger at Arch. "I'm not finished! I had to make a deal with that group Dusk in order to find you, and destroy you for what you did."

"I thought we defeated Dusk?" Arch said.

"They are Time Travelers. That does make it messy."

"But I thought we prevented them from ever existing?"

"But if you time traveled before you never existed you still exist."

"Ah, right. Forgot."

"You have a hard drive in your brain, how do you forg--"

"STOP TALKING LIKE I'M NOT HERE!" he yelled, "I DEMAND TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY!"

Graelyn laughed, "No thank you. Anyway, let me have my bag back."

He grinned, "Never. I finally have the upper hand on you, Graelyn Scythes. I have the power here, the leverage. The only way off this rock. Now you're going to--hey!"

While he was yammering, Arch hand simply pulled the bag out of his hand. He proceeded to block the thief by placing his hand on the top of his head as he flailed and tried to move forward.

"Right, let's get back to my birthday then, finish this up?"

Arch nodded, "Yeah, honestly I was expecting more of a threat today, I don't know why."

She shrugged, "I won't complain."

The thief promptly found himself out the door, which was slammed and locked behind him, and a chair put under the doorknob on the other side. Grumpily, he wandered off into the night.

"They'll take me seriously..." he muttered as she stepped into a puddle, and sighed.

\* \* \*

"Well now that that's done," Arch said, holding up a tablet in front of Graelyn who was sipping a glass of milk on the couch, "I have a special present for you!" While the lag is too bad for video calls here, I asked some of our friends to send you messages!"

Graelyn tilted her head, "Really? Why?"

"...Because it's your birthday and we care about you."

She looked down at her hands, "I guess that makes sense. I don't expect you got many."

He shook his head, "I got...a lot. So why don't we start." He flopped down next to her on the couch, and each of them holding a side of the tablet, hit play.

Loading.

Loading.

Video Message 1

"Hey Graelyn! This is Lady Aesculapius!" Lady Aesculapius says, wearing a T-Shirt that said, "I'm Lady Aesculapius" on it. "I just wanted to wish you a happy birthday, and I promise my friend Virginia Stens-6 will make you cupcakes when you get out of there--oh Blanche, Jason can you say hi."

A young woman who looked just like Graelyn, only with white hair, came into frame, "Hi. Sorry again about trying to murder you a few times."

A man wearing a t-shirt that said "I'm the ACE up your sleeve!" popped in from the other side of the frame, "Hey Graelyn! You might not remember me much, but happy birthday nonetheless!"

"Alright, that's all from us, your most successful spin off! Now go have fun!"

"Hey Graelyn, President Zhang Han here, wishing you a happy birthday from the presidency of Mars. My wife isn't here right now but my daughter Odysia is. Odysia look at the camera. Look!" she pointed at the Camera, and Odysia barely glanced at it from her perch on her mother's lap and then returned to staring at something out of frame. "Oh well. Anyway, I've arranged for a special gift for you to be placed at the following coordinates-" a series of numbers flashed up on screen. "Many happy returns."

Graelyn didn't learn this till later, but the gift was of course a basket of popular exports and products from the planet Mars, including four different varieties of olives.

"Happy birthday from Fleet Admiral Cornelia Carthage," the admiral said, sitting rigidly at her desk. A voice off camera asked: "...is that it?"

"Yes."

"Graelyn! Do you remember me? It's Alice MacLeod. Oh, wait sorry you've probably met dozens of me now. Specifically the first one, you know Songbird? I really hope you have a lovely birthday, and everyone else does too. Jack, Treyvon, Yi, Chantelle, and Shona. Though Shona went on a trip, I'm a little worried about her...regardless, even though we've been apart you're still one of my closest and dearest friends. I hope you visit soon. All the love from the World Revolutionary Council."

"Is this on?" Shona asked.

"It's on," The Tourist replied.

"Great! Hey Grae, it's me, Shona! Also your ex-girlfriend Ashlyn is here--"

"I TOLD YOU TO NOT MENTION THAT!" Ashlyn yelled.

"I thought you said you're on good terms?"

"That doesn't mean...oh whatever," Ashlyn popped into frame next to Shona, "Hi, Happy Birthday Graelyn. I hope you and that Archimedes fellow I've heard about are having a good time. Are you two together now?"

"ASHLYN!" Shona shoved her out of frame. "So yeah, me, the Tourist, Ashlyn, Pathway, and Miranda--not your Miranda a prototype one--all wish you the happiest day! Eat cake!"

Graelyn and Arch awkwardly didn't look at each other for 87 seconds, and then Graelyn played the next video.

A Graelyn appears, not our Graelyn, but well, it's a Graelyn, "Hey me! So, things have been really great with this version of our family here...I actually just became president of the physics club. Can you believe that? I've made a lot of friends here...and well...happy birthday. You deserve it. Cheers!"

A really gross man appears. This is more of an objective description than you'd think, because his skin has been ripped off his face. Auteur grins up at the camera, "Bonjour, my daughter. Are you well? Are you eating? Have you been eaten? I'm sorry I couldn't make whatever you invited me to which was," he looks down at a paper, "this video message. But I will be sure that I make you a video message next time to make up for it."

He stops to take a sip from a glass of something that it's hard to tell is blood or wine. Trick question-it's 50/50.

"Ah yes, the formalities: Happy Birthday my dear child. I tried making you a birthday present, by asking Dracula if he would meet you, but I was informed by Father and Mother that I was simply talking in my sleep. The nerve! The audacity! I'll make it happen though, I'll write you a tale that you'll never forget my child, you'll struggle and bleed and--"

The video kindly cuts out.

"Hey Grae, it's your former lawyer Jame Morrel. I hope you have a great one. And if you need more legal services just contact me at--"

Graelyn skipped ahead to the next one.

A woman appears, holding a mimosa. She is sitting on a golden throne, waited on by a man and woman in stereotypical butler and maid outfits. The throned woman is wearing an elegant black dress, and sunglasses. Indoors.

"Hello dear, this is Ariadne Moore, or as you're more familiar with me, Chess Mistress Hex--what no I'm tired of the caviar, get me something else--regardless I hear it's your birthday." There is a long pause. "So I hope that goes well for you or whatever."

"Wow," Arch said as the video ended.

"She really does care," Graelyn said.

There is a huge group-shot--we see tons of familiar faces: it's all of Dawn, standing under the swirling clouds of Spiral. A T-Rex dozes peacefully in the background. In the front is Kinan Jans, dressed as Sesshomaru from Inu Yasha.

"Hello Graelyn," Kinan Jans says in her monotone with a wave, "I hope you know how much you have meant to all of us here, and to me in particular. I know this is a message from your workplace so I'll try not to get too smarmy or whatever. But I wanted to dress up as my favorite memory together, when we went trick-or-treating in Nightmoore. Anyway, from all of us here at Dawn..."

The group shouts at the camera, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY!" which wakes the T-Rex up, and it roars, startling everyone as the camera cuts off.

Graelyn looked over at Arch, "Thank you. You didn't have to do that."

He shrugged, "I kinda did. You're my best friend."

"Right back atcha--wait whats that?"

Arch looked at the tablet, "Ah, we're getting a new file. Looks like a late entry?" He pressed play.

Kinan Jans and Backgammon Jenny appear. Jenny is popping gum, and sitting on the edge of Kinan's desk. Kinan is back to her usual outfit, fingers steepled.

"Arch informed us that you caught the culprit behind your stranding. It's good to know you'll be able to head back on your own power upon the completion of your quarantine. However..."

Jenny laughed, "They're going to hate this."

"Well as I said, I'm glad you caught the culprit," Kinan droned, "but you do know that now that you had contact with someone there we have to start your quarantine clock over."

Graelyn stared unblinking, "Cool," she said, "super cool. I figured my Birthday was going too well."

Arch put a hand on her shoulder, it was very big compared to her shoulder. "I'll make you something. Your birthday, whatever you like. I've been getting pretty decent at cooking despite, you know, eating mush."

Graelyn smiled, "Let's do it together. It may not be what we expected, but we'll make the best of it. Happy birthday to me."

***Thank you for five years of adventure. We hope to bring you many more. From all of us here at Arcbeatle Press and 10,000 Dawns, happy 5th anniversary to 10kd!***

Copyright 2020, Arcbeatle Press and James Wylder, all rights reserved.

Auteur is the property of Jacob Black, used with permission.

Chess Mistress Hex is the property of Taylor Elliott, used with permission.

Alice MacLeod is the property of Jo Smiley, used with permission.

10,000 Dawns and it's characters are the property of James Wylder and Arcbeatle Press.

This story is a work of fiction, any resemblance to persons living or dead, or events past or present is purely co-incidental. Any resemblance to characters not owned or licensed is done firmly within the grounds of parody or satire.

Arcbeatle Press is located in Elkhart, IN.

arcbeatlepress.com