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20 Years Ago...

Far away, a boy wandered his ravaged homeland. He walked across the ruins of the kingdom he was destined to rule.

"Father! Father!" he screamed as he ran across the wasteland. His royal father lay under a pile of wreckage. The young boy began to throw the pieces aside to uncover his injured father. Tears rolled down his face but his Count Karlov merely smiled at him.

"You will do well Werner; when the war is over, Vlatava will be yours..." His voice began to fade in volume and life. The crying boy, Werner, shook his head. He wouldn't let it happen.

"No! No! I won't let you leave me! I can't find Myra and mother, I need you to help! I need you to live..." Werner cried. His father smiled as his eyes closed, and his grin faded. The boy leaned over his fallen guardian, soaking his shirt with tears.

Then he heard something terrifying. The planes were coming back around toward him. He jumped up leaving the body of his father, scrambling to find shelter. He could hear the planes shriek behind him. He would not be able to out run them.

There was a loud, low whistling from above, getting closer and closer. Something flew before his eyes, and collided with the soil. There was an enormous flash of light, and the explosion sent Werner flying. He flew through the air, and then hit the dirt, skimming across the ground's

surface. Blood trickled from his eyes. His eyelids opened, a burst of pain was sent to his skull. The wasteland in front of him began to swerve, change color, and turn upside down. He shut his eyes, the pain disappeared, but he still felt dizzy and off balance, he felt the world move around him, but in the real world, he hadn't moved an inch.

Scared and confused, he crawled around desperately, blind, and hoping that someone would find him.

3 years ago.

Oliver Queen stalked through the jungle quickly. He could smell them, they were very close. This was his chance, his moment. He raced towards the eastern shore, with his make-shift bow in his right hand, and his sharpened arrow in his left. His shirt was torn to shreds, as were his pants. He hadn't had a change of clothes or a shower in months. Ollie stopped dead in his tracks. He had spotted them, the drug dealers. They had paid monthly visits, delivering their goods to a hitherto secret smuggler's cove on the remote isle.

Missed my chance last month...not letting it happen again. Two men, both kind of average. They'll be down before either knows what hit them.

An arrow shot out of the woods and hit the first dealer's shoulder; he fell to the sand, bleeding. The second dealer flung his gun out, pointing it into the jungle. Another arrow soared from the brush, nailing the second man's hand. His gun flew out of his grasp, digging into the sand, as he yelled in pain. Ollie charged out of the jungle, sending a rough blow to the second man's stomach, and then a left-hook to his jaw. He dropped to the white sand. The first rose up armed with a pole. He swung it towards the crazed-looking Oliver Queen. Ollie's hand darted out, catching the stick in mid-air, just as his foot crushed the dealer's nose. After catching his breath, he jumped and dragged the two onto the boat and started the engine. A smirk conquered his face.

Look's like I'm going home tonight...

“They can’t do this!” Vertigez smashed his fine china collection. He slammed his fist into the wooden table, making the assembled officers and ministers of state who were still loyal to him flinch and exchange worried looks.

“Werner, I’m sorry, the nation won’t have you anymore.” Spoke the somber Prime Minister. “You are a true son of your House, and an aristocrat of the ancient line. But the people demand democracy! The totalitarian ways of the monarchy are over...”

“Myra, you can’t tell me this is fair? If I were not blind, I would be a stronger ruler. I would crush that rabble outside who dare to march on my palace!” Werner turned to his younger sister, his black-red eyeballs unnerving even to she, who had seen them so often. “If not for that war with Markovia! This is father’s fault!”

“Werner, do not blame our father!” Myra protested.

“How can I not? He provoked them, so they came. The war ruined our country, and our economy! The mob never rose up before! My father never had to deal with this sort of treason! *I* am the rightful ruler of Vlatava!”

“I’m sorry Count Werner, but no longer...” Called a strident voice. The door to the throne room burst open, and the generals marched in, the cheering multitudes behind them...

A new day was dawning in Vlatava, and its ancestral ruler Count Werner Vertigez just could not see it...

Present Day...

“Mr. Queen...how can I repay you?”

Ollie and a blindfolded Count Werner Vertigez sat across from each other in Star City’s most exclusive restaurant, sipping vintage Dom Perignon and discussing business of great personal importance to the exiled nobleman.

Werner Vertigez, former Count of Vlatava. The damage that occurred to his optical cortex during the raid destroyed parts of his brain, and ultimately gave him distorted vision. He was basically blind, his sight spirally, distorted and wavy, even known to change color; it was the ultimate version of vertigo. My reasons for funding the experimental surgery to restore his normal sight? Well...in that small country of his, he was ousted—thrown off the throne! And since then, Vlatava has been ruled by the most corrupt government in Europe, a military junta that makes Hitler's Third Reich seem enlightened! There's been a groundswell to recall the former Royal Family, to return the land to what the people call their rightful ruler. Now, I'm no big fan of a monarchy, but that is one dangerous corner of the world, and a restored Count on the ancestral throne might stabilize things a bit. But he won't go back the way he is. This is a proud man who hates his vulnerability. If he is to one day return to his homeland and resume his rightful place, he would do it a whole man.

"Call me Oliver or Ollie. And you don't have to repay me" Ollie said picking up the menu. "I recommend the Beef Wellington. I know the chef here, and the man is a wizard with pastry..."

Werner smiled, but it was uncomfortable. This was a man unaccustomed to taking charity. "Mr. Queen, I will accept your generosity, but not out of pity."

Queen nodded, chuckling. "Alright, then; dinner's on you."

Werner agreed with a nod "And when I have been restored to my rightful place, I shall make you a Knight of Vlatava. Or one of my ministers, perhaps...?"

Now it was Ollie's turn to look uncomfortable. "Um, thanks, but I don't think I'm suited to that sort of thing, your grace. Besides, my interests in Star City keep my pretty busy."

"So Mr. Queen, what exactly do you do to pass the time in this charming city?"

"I shoot a little." Ollie remarked innocently, glancing out the window...

A dark figure in green hung over Star City. He watched as the cars raced by below, illuminating the city with their headlights. Echoes of sirens sounded through the steel canyon, reminding the hero why he was here.

Scipio Capote, that sly bastard...kidnapped the mayor's son. He's across from me, I can almost hear them. Patience is a virtue...but time doesn't stand still, and nor will Capote and his men.

"Time's up."

The Emerald archer swooped up from his perch, leaping on to the fire escape high above the city streets, stumbling next to the windowsill. He yanked an arrow from his arsenal and nocked it into place. SWOOSH. The arrow smashed through the glass, and darted into the room. Ollie heard the panic and shouting happening beyond the window, as smoke enveloped the room.

Inside the room, a fist came from the fog, and smacked a bodyguard's face, sending him to the carpet. A boot heel cut through another's lip, as another took another man down. An arrow shot through the smoke gliding across the air. The dull tip, burst open, revealing a boxing glove that knocked a gunman against the wall. Arrow spun around with his bow loaded, pointing at an approaching, figure. He let go, shooting the weapon, as the smoke revealed a gunman.

The thug went down with a groan, his bullet ricocheting off the wall.

But the distraction gave Capote time to escape with his prize.

"Get back here, you fat-cat sonuva—!" The Emerald Archer rushed out of the room in pursuit. He strung up an arrow as he arrived at the elevator. His fingers pulled back and he let loose, seconds later the doors exploded, revealing the dark, dusty shaft. He ran off the edge, and grabbed onto the metal cord descending towards the descending elevator car. His boots collided with the car-top. The hero lost his balance, but soon steadied himself. He reached for his titanium arrow, drilling it into the roof of the car, carving out a hole. The slate of metal fell down into the car, along with another smoke arrow. Capote was thrown to the floor, as the vigilante swung in from above. The overweight, bald, middle-aged

crimelord, did not stand a chance, and after a haymaker to the chin, sunk to the floor.

Green Arrow turned to the scared teenager behind him. "C'mon we're getting you out of here. Your father the mayor's going to be worried sick..."

Ollie watched the operation intensely. It had never been attempted before. The surgeons were going to uncharted territory to repair this man's eyes and brain...

Brain and eye damage...being repaired by combining biological organs with mechanical parts...not exactly the safest experiment-or my preference, but it just may do the job. Those S.T.A.R Labs guys know what they're doing. I don't like the way their going about it, but they're the best.

Oliver waited eagerly as the operation continued. He peered in on the surgery, to spot a nauseous scientist shivering and shaking.

What the hell is—Holy Hannah!

The scientist slipped on the floor and landed on the patient just as he opened the eyelids. His knife flew into the wall, and he was immediately shoved off the patient by the others.

Oliver grabbed the overseer, "What the hell is happening in there?"

"I don't kno-Huh?!" the overseer paused mid-sentence. Ollie's eyes shifted to the surgery, another doctor had fallen. There was a small red flash, and the two others scientists stumbled backwards, crashing into the tables, breaking tubes of chemicals. The man tripped falling in the chemicals and shattered glass.

"Get someone in there!" ...No volunteers. Oliver rushed to the door, and kicked it open rushing into the surgery room. He raced to the operation table to find Vertigez's eyes and forehead a bloody mess. His blue eyes met with the patient's red ones.

“Queen...”

A series of wavy red flashes, rose from his eyes, and Ollie stumbled to one knee. The room went upside down, the colors changed, and everything swerved and curved, and then it faded. Queen rose to face Vertigez only to feel the same sense of vertigo again. As soon as his normal vision returned, he scanned the room, to see the doctors and scientists unconscious, physically hurt, or soaked with chemicals.

“My god Werner...” whispered Ollie, noticing the patient soaked in blood, dripping from above.

“Werner I can’t make it any better! It needs to be reversed!” Ollie paced back and forth while Vertigez sat in an office chair, while the next room over, the surgeons calculated their mistake.

“Why does it matter?” Demanded the elated Count. “I have my vision back!”

“It matters because you can’t control this effect, and it’ll hurt people. Nobody’s safe as long as this continues.” Ollie rubbed his face intensely. He finally made a decision. “I’ll see wha-Unh!” A boot slammed into his face, knocking him on to the cold metal floor. He looked up at those blood-red irises, as they flashed, and everything became a blur.

“Mr. Queen, no one tells me what to do. Especially not a commoner like you. I’m keeping this vision, whether you like it or not.” Vertigez reached down and grabbed Oliver by the collar lifting him up into the air and pressing him against the windows. Beyond the glass, was the city, glowing in the night. With a wicked smile, Werner flung the millionaire back and drove him through the glass.

The shattered glass fell to the floor stained by blood. Vertigez glanced at the busy streets below; Queen had disappeared.

Below one of the building’s ledges, Oliver clung for life, not being able to

see anything but blurs and spirals of colored lights. He shivered, as the cool wind blew against the cuts that scattered across his body. Lights and blurs took shape soon, and his vision returned. He clutched the ledge tighter, when he realized the height he was at. He began to breathe easily, in order to calm himself. Once ready, he swung forth with his feet, swinging backwards and boosting off the building, letting go. Upwards, he soared through the air, landing in a roll back through the window.

Damn...that was close...he got away. Can't handle the situation like this anymore, though.

Queen Enterprises guards flooded through the halls, shooting at Vertigez as he passed by. After one look at him, the soldiers would sway, drop their weapons and stumble to the floor, crawling around hysterically.

From the ceiling more guards dropped, firing the weapons point-blank at the enemy. Instantly, they all plunged to the floor and began to roll around attempting to make sense of their jumbled vision. As Vertigez preceded down the hallway, a green-clad warrior flew out, and tackled him to the ground.

FWAM! The Emerald Archer hurled Werner against the wall. His golden goatee hung an inch from Veritgez's chest. His eyes glared up at the experiment-gone-wrong. His scowl slowly, faded...this was his fault. He hired those men, he organized this.

My fault.

His grip loosened, and the instant feeling of vertigo came back. The room shook around him and everything went wavy, as his opponent continued to take blows at his face. Green Arrow spun into the wall, and was sent to the hard floor, his jaw pounding. Ollie pushed himself off the surface immediately, but got a swift kick to the stomach, sending him rolling into the wall. He reared his head around, as a knife came down. The archer reached for an arrow, as his foot bolted up.

"AYAAGGGH!"

Funny that I feel sorry, when this is the guy who threw me out of a window.

Blood and sparks burst across the room, as the knife dove to the floor and Vertigez, jumped back with an arrow tip dug into his left eye. Green Arrow rushed at the enemy, forcing him against the opposite wall.

Wrong...but necessary.

Green Arrow gripped his foe by the shoulders, ignoring the blood that dripped down his arrow and on to his shoulder. His fierce face took on a more sympathetic expression.

"Werner... end this," He whispered into Vertigez's ear.

"No!" Vertigez broke free, shoving the Emerald Archer backwards, continuing to punch him in the chest and then drop-kicking him in the stomach. The hero rolled to the floor.

"Here Mister Queen," Green Arrow's mouth hung open, Vertigez effortlessly guessing his secret identity. "This belongs—" He pulled the arrow out of his eye, and raised it over the Emerald Archer, "—To you." The exiled Count dropped down on the archer, piercing Ollie's stomach with his own arrow.

The heavy breaths that Vertigez was exhaling slowed, as he crept away, soaked in his own blood.

"I'm sorry Werner..." Green Arrow moaned, clutching his wound.

Three Months Later...

Oliver awoke in a cold sweat, leaping up from his pillow staring out of the open door, in front of him, catching breezes from outside on the balcony of his penthouse. His foot slid on to the floor as he approached the screen shutting it, not giving a second thought to the strange occurrence. The knob turned, and water poured from the faucet into his hands, seconds before splashing it on his worn face. Snatching a towel, he

wiped his face. Bad vibe.

Ollie's head spun around, as his eyes landed on a familiar figure. He was clothed in green and black, with a bullseye on his chest, and a mask. Even in the ridiculous costume Ollie knew who he was. The Count of Vlatava smirked, reading a newspaper from the rich man's beside table.

" 'Count Vertigo attempts coup, considered dangerous terrorist... I didn't vrealize I was this famous over here. Now, Mr. Queen, I wanted to forget about you and wanted you to forget about me, but I'm having frequent headaches... I think it's your fault."

"Werner—" He was cut off quickly.

"Vertigo. Count Vertigo, Mr. Queen. It's what all the newspapers are calling me now." Queen reached for his lamp, brandishing it and charging at the intruder.

Vertigo. The room faded into a spiral of psychedelic swirls. Ollie slipped and slid into the wall, Vertigo's cold gauntlet wrapped around his neck shoving him up against the wall.

"You see...Ollie, I will be back in power. I've already recruited quite the mercenary army" The multi-millionaire stared straight into the now mechanical left eye, surrounded by a metal plate. "Hmmm? Oh yes, you see I've recovered quite nicely from your parting gift to me, Green Arrow?"

He knows...

"Yet, your perfidy has scarred me for life."

"Werner please, you know you were out of control. You still are no—AH!" Thrown across the room, Ollie crashed into his desk.

"As we speak, my troops are infiltrating strategic spots in the city; call it a dress rehearsal for my assault on Vlatava. And what will the great Emerald Archer do then?"

"You're bluffing." Queen smirked, lifting himself from the ground.

Count Vertigo returned the expression, but with a hint of cockiness.

He's bluffing, right?

"We'll see." Another wave of vertigo struck Ollie. An elbow to the head, and he was unconscious.

Vertigo glared disgustedly down at the hero before turning to the balcony. He stepped off the edge, flying out over Star City. As he soared above the skyscrapers he snatched a communicator from his belt and switched it on. "Proceed with the operation."

The soldier on the opposite end of the transmission, clad in a black stealth-suit, switched his Comlink off, attached it to his belt, and waved to the horde of similar soldiers behind him.

"I told you, I can't make it...no no, it's not that I don't like Jerry. Jerry's fine, but I have to take my children to this soccer tournament south...I understand, wait a second I'm getting another call." Lucille Page entered the bank joining the long line. She pulled her phone down into view, switching to the second line. "Hello? Oh hi honey! Mommy's really busy right now, okay?I promise to call you—"

BAM! Rubble flew, as the west wall of Star Bank was blown into smithereens. Vlatavian mercenaries flooded in, knocking civilians to the floor. Chaos. Lucille was flipped over, and knocked into a desk. Blood began to flow from her head injury as she became delirious. Security officers wrapped their hands around their holsters, raising firearms at the black-clad soldiers. The leading Vlatavian was marked with a red dash on his left eye. All other Vlatavian eyes centered on him, as he nodded in approval. The group separated. Gunfire began, yet ended quickly, as the soldiers took security down quickly. The leader spun around to Page, staring her down. His glove grasped her collar, dragging her away from the crowd.

Page was shoved into the giant vault, still shaky from her head injury. Stumbling to the ground, she lifted her phone, still clenched back to her

face. She began to whisper prayers into it, sobbing madly. The mercenary slowly pulled a dagger from his utility belt, giving her a few last words. The dagger drove at her hand, shattering her cellular phone, and impaling her palm into the wall. Blood seeped from her wound as she began to fade.

“My apologies,” The international Vlatavian terrorist known only as the Viper spoke with a thick accent, and a malignant smile.

“Viper’s down.”

Vertigo’s smirk died, as his communicator buzzed. His fists shook with suppressed anger. The Vlatavian ruler, pressed down on the line.

“How?” his voice was filled with hate and disgust, as if that was all he had ever lived off of.

“He found the target, and apparently he was about to end it, but someone blew out his ear-drums and took him down, sir.”

“ARGH!”

The communicator snapped, Vertigo’s hand crushing it into pieces.

Soldiers marched throughout the streets, shaking the trashcans as their boots stomped on the ground in uniform cadence. The black-clad army seemed unstoppable; the SCPD was useless against them, falling quickly at the hands of the merciless mercenaries.

The mob approached City Hall. A green arrow swept from above colliding with the asphalt ahead of the soldiers. A minor explosion sent the mob stumbling backward and the smoke spread across the plaza, obscuring the vision of all in the crowd.

The modern day Robin-Hood perched on a low wall and fired shaft after shaft into the mercenary troop, dropping them with each expertly-aimed

shot.

Above, Vertigo watched the mess he had created. Chaos and havoc ruled the streets as Star City became a no man's land free for all. Citizens trampled each other, his troops marauded without discipline, but worst of all, the Emerald Archer prevailed.

His archenemy was routing his men, taking them down systematically by arrow. His plan had failed.

"This isn't over, Queen..."

Werner's mad. I can't take him lightly anymore. He's just not another crook. But he's also my mistake.

The archer crept the steps to the Queen Enterprises building and into the shattered doors of the structure, dashing through the ruined lobby. Before Vertigo's guard could move, the archer wrapped his arm around his throat, and brought him to the floor.

"Where is he?!"

A lone guard strolled through the corridor, his eyes scanning the ceiling. He turned the corner, and got nailed in the stomach by a blunt arrow, that wrapped him in netting. Green Arrow continued to the emergency stairwell, beginning his climb. He paced himself, reserving energy for the task ahead.

Floor Thirty Three.

The stairwell door flung open as Green Arrow emerged into the pitch black hallway.

"Vertigo!" The Emerald Archer began to roam the hallways, approaching the conference room in the dark. The lights flashed on just as his

hand landed on the room's door-knob. Two devices attached to the ceiling duplicated Vertigo's eyes, spinning the hero into a flurry of blur and dizziness. He shut his eyes, and the vertigo declined, some dizziness remaining but he felt okay. He flung out an arrow and fired it at where the device had been. He heard a small crackle. If he was correct, the other one was exactly parallel to this that one. He nocked another arrow and shot it directly across from the first and heard the same sound. The dizziness had disappeared, and he slowly opened his eyes. His aim was as good as ever.

"Very good, Mr. Queen." The Count hovered behind him, taunting him. The Emerald Archer turned, leaping at the villain, phasing right through him. "Here," The voice came from behind him. Ollie twisted around, charging at the Count, only to witness him multiplying himself. The hero stopped dead in his tracks. "You see, I've become a house of mirrors." The hero took a swing at the one to the far left, as the opposite eye's spun around, spiraling Ollie's universe. Everything became jumbled and jaded again. Crashing through the door, the hero was grabbed and thrown across the room.

"You're nothing..." The Count snatched Green Arrow by the neck, smashing his head through the window, covering Ollie in glass splinters. Ollie's eyes flickered open, and viewed his Star City buried in terror and pain. The green-clad hero threw himself backwards, sending the Count a haymaker. He spun into the wall sinking to the rug.

"Call them off." Green Arrow pinned an arrow against the Count's right eye, his only eye. "Your men gave you surgery on your left eye, after I took it. The whole experience was very painful, right? Don't go through it again Werner, neither of us want that. But then again, now I'm just lying." Vertigo didn't flinch or move, he lie there silent. The Count faded into nothingness, as the real one clenched the Arrow's neck lifting him. He tightened his grip, closing off Queen's trachea. He fought for a breath as Vertigo smirked in triumph.

"I set out to take you down, you, your city, and the others who were involved in the 'incident'. I've succeeded." Vertigo ripped the quiver from the archer's back, breaking it and its contents in half. He let go of his captive, who fell to the ground grasping his neck for breath. "You gave me my gift, I'll give you your pitiful life for now."

Vertigo smiled devilishly, swinging around approaching the exit. The Emerald Archer's fingers crept over to the broken arrows, wrapping his weak hands around an explosive arrow. He lifted it, and with all the strength he had left, flung it at the Count. The half arrow soared across the room spinning in the air, leaking nitro glycerin, seeming to go in slow motion. The point collided with the door as Vertigo shut it.

The explosion was of giant proportions, recoiling back to the other explosive arrows, and setting them off as well. As the floor blew up simultaneously, exploding itself, the windows burst, shooting the vigilante out of them. As he descended through the cold air, he watched the 33rd floor and his penthouse above it collapse on each other.

The Emerald Archer fell into the lagoon just in front of the building, creating a monster splash. He sunk slowly, fading in his weak form. Giant chunks of rubble dove in to the pool of water from above, sinking around him. He could barely dodge the giant stones, finally finding the will-power to survive and surface. His head lifting from underneath the water, as he gasped for breathe, and climbed out of the deep lagoon. Gathering strength he limped across the building's garage entrance, dropping under a ledge, to protect himself from the raining debris.

The Emerald Archer breathed heavily, ripping off his mask and tossing his hat to the side. Tears strolled down his cheeks as buried his head in his gloves.

Damn it, Werner...

"Clean-up in the city begins, and President Max Lord lodges an official protest with the military government of Vlatava over the recent terrorist attacks. General Brunov, the Vlatavian head of state, denies any involvement from his country, decrying the actions of the former ruler, Count Werner Vertigez as rogue and not sponsored by his government. The whereabouts of the supervillain who now calls himself Count Vertigo are currently unknown..." Ollie switched the TV off, grumbling angrily in the hotel suite he had rented out.

I'm going to find you, Werner. I had a hand in making you what you are, but you need to be brought to justice. You might be able to escape the law, but you won't escape the sites of Green Arrow...!

The End.

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Food for the mind