

Allan can't move or even think. In the fading light he sees not a huge bloody monster or a dagger-toothed beast adorned with muscles, but a thin figure that is already dead and just as terrifying. It has an entire city cowering in fear from its ruthlessness. It will kill Allan and enjoy it.

Jibbawk waves at him, taunting him, as it moves forward. Allan tries to step back, but he can't. Bugs fall off of Jibbawk as it moves. They crawl to catch up to it. As Jibbawk approaches, Allan realizes Jibbawk isn't dark because of the growing night. It is pitch black because the bugs are beetles as dark as black holes. It has red glowing eyes that emanate a heat from within them like a volcano ready to blow.

"I will have the key whether you give it to me or I take it from your dead fingerssss," Jibbawk says, reaching out for Allan. Its voice is hoarse, but steady. It feeds off Allan's fear, breathing it in like pure oxygen. "Sss, I only want what I deserve," it says. "When everything is taken from you by forccece, is revenge not the only way to be whole again?"

*It's hard to picture this thing, this moving, churning, angry apparition as a scientist. It must have been pretty smart in order to manipulate genes and DNA and create the creatures on Lan Darr. If Mizzi is right, this thing might be responsible for the diverse life on this entire world.*

*Maybe Jibbawk made it all up a long time ago. Maybe it wanted everyone to think it was the God of this place, but it really wasn't. Isn't that what all megalomaniacs want, power over others?*

Jibbawk reads Allan's resistance and gives up its sympathetic appeal. "I made thisss, all of thisss, possible. Everyone owes me their lives. They should all be on their knees at my feet. And sssso should you!"

It's patriarchal plea falls on deaf ears. The shepherd that'll kill the sheep to keep them in line is no shepherd at all. It doesn't look so smart to Allan, just ruthless and desperate.

Jibbawk lunges. Allan's brain snaps into focus. He sprints in between two buildings and turns down a parallel street. He runs through another gap between buildings. Shadows from dead trees startle him. He gasps as he searches for a way through the thickets and the thorns and the boulders and bricks.

Every building is in ruins, but some walls are more intact than others. He looks over his shoulder. Jibbawk isn't far behind. It is truly the most frightening creature in this entire world.

It doesn't look like Jibbawk is running because the beetles that form its legs are shifting and rotating, moving like little wheels. To move faster Jibbawk bends down and lets its entire lower half break apart. Now the beetles roll Jibbawk along like it's on a tank track. It makes a sickening clicking, snapping sound.

Allan's belt beeps. He looks at the light where the battery crystal is. He's used about half the power. He's got three and a half hours before the legs are useless. So Allan runs harder. Fear courses through him in waves. He runs through another alley then down the street and rests against a pile of large bricks. It's dark now. Jibbawk is nowhere to be seen. Allan can't run forever. He needs a plan, some way to hide or to fight. But how can he fight a ghost made of beetles?

There's a building that still has a roof and four walls so Allan ducks inside.

Immediately, he regrets his move. Hiding isn't a good plan. If he's found, he's trapped. There's no window, no hole in the wall and only one way in or out. A dry twig snaps just outside. *Oh no!* Should he run? Should he stay? Here he needs to make a quick choice again and

he can't. He's frozen with indecision. Allan makes for the doorway, but Jibbawk steps into it. Allan scampers back to the far corner wanting to scream, wanting to fight, but able to do neither. Jibbawk takes one claw and scratches a large 'X' in the wall. The 'X' bleeds red. It places its pincers on either side of the doorway; beetles break off and crawl along the walls. They disengage from its feet as well. Jibbawk melts into the walls and floor as thousands of beetles come closer and closer. Their pincers snap, snap, snapping.

“That key is mine!” Jibbawk roars. “And sso is your sssoul.”