

SOLDIERS

A TALE OF XX CHROMO WARFARE

BY
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**BY
THE
AUTHOR
OF:**

**HORRIPILATIONS UNEARTHED (WITH BEN-GI
NINE ONE TWO: A NOVEL OF INVASION
DOWNfALL: OBLITERATION (WITH BENJAMAN THORNTON
AND MIKE UCHIDA)**

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FOR

Megan.

Mom.

Dad.

Just because.

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**END
BASIC
COMBAT
LEAVE
WAR
AFTERMATH
BEGINNING**

THANKS

**To Ben, for the motivation.
To NANOWRIMO.ORG, for the challenge.
I couldn't have done it without you.**

FORWARD

I wanted to write about soldiers, so I did. They needed to be grunts, low-level and expendable. Also, they needed to be female, 'cause that's what my muse decreed. Hey, I'm not gonna argue with her! I just tried to get all the words out as fast as they came to me. It was quick and dirty—almost combative in its nature, and it sure was a lot of fun. At the very least, I hope it entertains *you*.

Glitch, that's enough of that. Let the tale begin.

END

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BURN

The laser burned like liquid love. Green, pencil-thin, firelight spewing and sparking against her skin. She clenched her teeth, curled her lips and bit back curses. The pain was severe, just like they said it would be, but nothing could have prepared her for the constancy of it all—the unrelenting burning sensation that was attacking the entirety of her skin instead of just the point where the beam stitched her flesh. Had someone really poured

molten lava inside her veins? At that moment, it seemed possible.

In her mind, distracted as it was, she had expected the smell of smoldering flesh. She'd expected that unique stench. She had smelled it enough to be sure. Knew she would smell it again, probably. For a second there, a memory threatened to announce itself in her mind, and—for more than a second—her mind told her that she *could* smell burning flesh. That *she* was burning. Just like the others. Just like—

No. Stop it. Stop it right now.

Avoiding remembering the past was the best way to proceed now. Forward progress meant pushing all...*that* back where her mind could ignore it. Could deny it even. For periods of time at least.

The laser bit deep, and, through no real fault of her own, her body bucked. The machinery tracked her movement, never losing its place, the line it was etching in her bicep continuing uninterrupted, smooth and flowing, tracing her muscles and curves.

Pain, she thought. *It's just weakness leaving the body. That's all it is.*

Those weren't her words of course. They were somebody else's. At the thought of them, a memory managed to surge up; she wasn't quick enough to stop it. There it was, plain and raw, perhaps burning worse than the laser. How could a memory hurt that much? Were the wounds still that new?

A tear formed.

That wasn't supposed to be possible anymore. She had lost that part of herself. Pushed it away in fact, feeling some measure of relief that she could be rid of that particular conduit for her misery. They had promised her it wasn't possible. They had promised!

Well, it was obvious they had been lying, or had been wrong. At the time, they had most likely just wanted her to stop screaming. To stop clawing at her face. To stop making the damage worse. But, most of all, to stop splattering her own blood all over their fresh, white coats.

Yeah, they had lied. Well, that was okay. They had done their job and patched her up. Got her working again. Mostly.

She suppressed the emotions quickly, before they could get out of control. With her body reclined, strapped down, the tear ran back away from her face. It was cool, drying there. She wished she could wipe it away instead of leaving it there to itch. Instead of leaving it there as a small, wet reminder of what had happened. Of what she had been. Of what could not be undone.

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The machinery, looming over her, looking like a mechanized spider, moved noiselessly, realigning, the green beam winking out momentarily. The nozzle tracked across her chest, pausing momentarily before rotating up. She stared into the nozzle, wondering if it was malfunctioning and was about to lase a groove in her retina.

She was briefly aware of how much pain she was in before the nozzle rotated back down and the green beam re-manifested. It zigzagged across her breastbone, biting into her soft flesh. The pain was off the scale suddenly. Her body bucked again, maybe more violently than the machinery could account for this time—a permanent mistake.

And what was this? Another tear? And another? Too many to stop now. How could this happen? Was there really this much weakness left in her? She had put all that behind her! Hadn't she?

The laser continued to work its vile beam over her naked body. As it did, the tears persisted. She was too weak now to stop them. Too weak to resist. Too weak to stay awake. Tears steamed against her heated flesh as she passed into the uneasy bliss of unconsciousness.

As she slipped away, she began to dream.