

the eyesore

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the eyesore

by [Thunderbirds and Lightning](#)

Summary

In which X recovers, gains a psychologist, opens up a little, survives attempted murder, and finally gets *out* of the facility. The world is so, so much bigger than he'd thought.

(Set in Bee_4's Stuffed Bird AU)

Notes

Bee. Your fic and AU are so fleshed out and Amazing and this is all I could do to give it justice. Amazing story, incredible word-building, I just-
Go read the fic if you haven't already! Because this one will undoubtedly give spoilers.
<3

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

- Inspired by [this is about a stuffed bird](#) by [Bee_4](#)

He awakes to a throbbing ache behind his left eye, and a white, needling light blinding his right. His lungs and veins feel like they've been hollowed out by sandpaper; each truncated breath he drags through them only pulls wisps of air through his body.

The light suddenly turns off. X is momentarily dazzled before his vision loses the black sparkles crackling at its peripherals, and he sees—

A blond man with bright eyes, swathed in a too-big lab coat and shielded with goggles, holding a pen-light and clutching a clipboard to his chest. X moves forward on instinct, only to feel his chest tighten at the iron bands pinioning him to the mattress; his wrists are equally shackled down, one hooked into a thin wire that he traces to an IV drip above his head.

The angle is awkward, but X can tell that he's still young, only a few years his senior.

“Any attempt to escape will be neutralised, subject oh-three-fifty,” the man says, carefully modulated voice soft in the air that reeks of death, and X scoffs at that. The act is there, stage lights and all. Perhaps he can push the script a little off-piste.

“I have a name,” he mutters, voice weaker than he would prefer, and then has to think for a moment before adding: “—X.”

“X,” the man repeats, with another gentle smile and a nod that holds no weight. “You are subject oh-three-fifty, the prototype—” he points to a copper panel attached to the bed's footboard with his pen-light, concealed from X's view but he can guess what it reads regardless. “But I'll call you X, if that suits you better.”

It still feels rehearsed. The man has the air of someone trying to calm a rabid wolf, an insane patient. A prototype, cleaved from the rest of the world and left to rot in his own violent thoughts.

“What's your name?” X asks.

The man blinks and nearly drops the pen-light. “I'm sorry?”

“Your name.” X starts to drum his fingers on the metal parts of the bed he can reach, *one-two-three one-two-three one-two three* until the man takes a deep breath through his nose.

“Any subject here is to refer to me as—”

X scoffs again, ignoring how his throat tears into itself at the motion.

“Excuse me?” the man says quietly.

“I meant your real name.”

“That's classified.”

“So's every part of this room. You've been screened by security.” X huffs. “*Concorp* is classified. Would you be here if you weren't trusted to keep a secret?”

The man swallows. “Right.” He fiddles with the cap of the pen-light. “I won't tell anyone if you don't?”

X makes a jerking gesture with his head to the wires, the manacles, the metal cuffs locking him down. “Does it look like I'm going anywhere?”

The man's gaze catches his face, and briefly, minutely— he stiffens. X does not know his own appearance, but this doesn't bode well.

“No, no— I suppose you don't.” The man eventually smiles, and with the smile comes a soft exhale. “It's just between us, right? I'll be quartered if management finds out.”

“It’s not you they’re worried about.” X gives a nonchalant sigh. “It’ll end up with me being dissected anyway. Want to be the next *prototype*?” He spits the word with as much ice and contempt as he can manage in this numbed state.

The man pauses. “I’d rather not, if that’s alright with you.” His next words hesitate, balanced on the tip of his tongue: conspiratorial. “I’m Dr Zedaph, by the way. I’d shake your hand, but—”

“Not a problem.”

A beat. X’s left eye socket still pulses, throbs.

“I presume you remember what happened?” Dr Zedaph asks suddenly.

“The rearrangement of your genetic material is pretty difficult to forget.”

Something like a shudder flickers over his features before Dr Zedaph again starts to speak. “You’ll have to see me for a while — lucky for you, ha? — for some preliminary checks before you’re transferred over. See how you’re adjusting. Open your eye, for me?”

X barely has time to register the lack of plural before that needle-sharp penlight is back, searing his retina, no chance to squint against it.

Sticking out his tongue in concentration, Dr Zedaph moves the light slowly back and forth, tracking the motion of the pupil and scribbling on his clipboard with a stubby pencil.

“Done,” he says, and X screws up his eyelids to reduce the burning ache of his skull. The throb behind his other eye still persists, resounding in time with the pulse in his wrist. A surge of heat washes through the eye socket with each *ba-thump*, the tripping rhythm of a drumbeat.

“I’ll be back in a few days,” Dr Zedaph says, pocketing the pencil and spinning on his heel to face the door. He swipes a card through a small reader on the side, and the door shutters open for him, slamming closed with a metallic echo once he had disappeared through it.

X is left alone, and he remains awake until the IV introduces a sedative into his bloodstream, enough to burden his eyelids and push him into an unwilling, dreamless sleep.

Every whitecoat entering his room leers, or sniffs, or offers nothing at all by means of an expression, holding his limp body in a mercilessly scrutinising gaze tighter than the bands around his chest and wrists.

He has been called 0-3-5-0 for an eternity, never to his face: only in hushed snippets guarded with glances that X does not dare to parse. Dr Zedaph treated him like a person. A patient. It had taken persuasion, but X suspects the feeling was shallow under his skin, and required little encouragement to break through the script tripping over his tongue.

Other whitecoats come and go, swabbing his nose and throat with a ferocity enough to make them bleed, and X is left choking on acidic, neon blood that claws its way down the back of his mouth, dribbling past his lips. From veins they draw fluid, and then pull bandages over the marks they leave. He is a prisoner in this windowless room buried under tonnes of earth and concrete.

Dr Zedaph returns a few days later. X smiles dimly at him, and he reciprocates it warmly.

“How are you feeling?” he asks kindly, dragging a plastic chair to the side of X’s bed before

settling himself there as if it were a worn, cushioned couch and not something that adhered itself to your skin with sweat.

“Fine,” X replies, and Dr Zedaph nods before scribbling something down on his clipboard.

“Any pain?”

“No less than usual.”

And on it goes, until Dr Zedaph shuffles through the leaves of paper to find a series of black splotches, which he then holds in front of X as he scrutinises them for some semblances of pattern.

“Moth.”

“A face.”

“Knife.”

“Sword.” (“Would you mind clarifying the difference *between* the knife and the sword?” Dr Zedaph had asked.)

The next time he looks up to change the image, X fixes him with a tight stare.

“Dead body.”

“I haven’t even shown you it yet!” Dr Zedaph splutters.

“I know,” X says simply. “And that’s what I see. If you don’t want it to be yours, you can write that one down too.”

He obliges.

“I have something,” Dr Zedaph then says, after a pause too long to hold any harmless meaning. He shrugs the lab-coat from his shoulders with a rustle of the thick cotton fabric. He begins to swing from one sleeve like a lasso, building up momentum like the whirl of a windmill’s sails— until he lets go, and the coat deposits itself neatly on the camera in the corner of the room with all the grace of an albatross coming into roost.

“Oops,” says Dr Zedaph, with a bubble in his voice that conveys the exact opposite. “Shame, really.”

A snort of amusement asserts itself in X’s throat. Still, something feels off: this room is monitored from many angles, and the single, whirring camera is outdated technology. He stores the thought in the back of his foggy mind and settles to disregard it.

The strip lighting glints off a metallic surface that appeared suddenly in Dr Zedaph’s hand, flashing like a beacon as he moves.

X blinks. It’s a mirror. He blinks again, and it is still a mirror.

“What’s that for?” he murmurs, slurred by the dregs of sedative still numbing his system. Already his mind is ticking overtime, thinking of how he could take the opportunity to shatter it, use one of the longer shards to cut these infernal cables and drag him one step further *out* of this hospital room. Where he’d go from *there*, however: X has not the slightest idea. This level is underground, and he doesn’t remember where he’d been taken before the surgery.

“You don’t know what they did, do you?”

“Typhon. I’m— changed.” He takes a shuddering breath. “Better, they said. It’s possible now, isn’t it? And this is the proof.” His wrists jerk, sending a dull bolt of pain through his arm where the needle moves inside his vein.

“I know,” Dr Zedaph says patiently. “But that’s a broad term, isn’t it? Don’t you know what happened— *exactly?*”

X pauses, and stays silent.

Dr Zedaph’s face is troubled, his mouth a worried line. “Do you want to look?”

“Yes,” croaks X, because he can’t remember what he looked like before all of this happened, and he can’t live — however long that may be — in fear and unknowing. Concorp will not get the better of him.

Dr Zedaph props the mirror up in front of X’s face and turns away, but X doesn’t care.

The thing staring back at him, it’s—

It’s.

He only has eyes for the pulsating, sickly *thing* gazing back at him from the glass, a mess of stitches and scales and a bilious, fleshy fist palpitating through his left eye socket, in time with the throbs of heat and sound.

Ba-thump.

Ba-thump.

Something in his throat snags.

“I’m going to untie your wrists,” says Dr Zedaph, and all of a sudden he can *move* . The exact moment is indeterminable but he feels the release of pressure like a change in the wind.

X brings a trembling, chalk-pale hand up to his cheek, running his fingers along the thin grey-and-red scales that shiver there, along the angle of his cheekbone and past his temples and into his hairline.

They are almost like feathers, X thinks, in their delicacy. He strokes them and hates how sensitive they are, how when he brushes their edges his skin pulls tighter, with a twinge of dulled pain to accompany it.

The heart in his left eye socket quickens its pulse. It’s not the red he’d thought his blood was, or used to be— more off-red, lurid, the colour of graffiti or neon lights or a firework. It looks out of place set into his skull and surrounded with grey scales and exposed to the air that smells of death.

Ba-thump.

X closes his eyes in the hope that it’s all some elaborate nightmare, or a side-effect of the Typhon, but even in the warm, red-tinted darkness of the inside of his eyelids he can still feel the judder of his heartbeat: horribly close-by, and emitting waves of heat with every pulse.

X pushes the mirror away from himself.

“It’s fine,” he says hoarsely, and Dr Zedaph takes the invitation to draw the chair away from X’s bed, pull his labcoat from the camera and slip through the door, leaving X thoroughly alone with the image of his own warped, distorted face flooding every space within his mind.

[Recovered from the office of Dr Zedaph, psychologist, recorded 20:46:03—20:49:36 —/—/—]

Ah, Dr Zedaph! [scrape of furniture, and a muffled creak] I trust your new assignment is working well for you.

[click of a pen] Indeed.

How is he, ah... finding things, shall we say?

Fine. I mean, that’s what oh-three-fifty told me, after all— or, he calls himself X, now.

This three-fifty appears to be quite the character. *You* don’t call him X, though, Zed?

[pause]

No.

Fantastic! [creak of wooden furniture] Can’t have our staff disobeying Concorp Code, right? Or we’d have all *sorts* of projects leaked before completion. [inhale] And that would *not* be good for reputation.

[weak chuckle] No, not at all, Scar. I understand you.

Good, Zed! I’m glad to have an employee I can trust with matters like these.

That’s— that’s good. I’m glad. For you, and for Concorp.

[exhale and scrape of chair legs, as someone stands up] But regarding the topic of loyalty: I’ve heard reports from the guards about your time spent with three-fifty. I have the document here. Would you like me to read it to you, Dr Zedaph?

Please.

[sound of rustling paper] It says here that you brought a mirror into the subject's room after the recent surgery to relocate the cardiac hub, after you disabled the camera in the corner of the room.

Scar, sir— I was instructed to be friendly, so that X— three-fifty— would co-operate with us, after such a stressful time. A psychological insight into someone experiencing the first batch of the Typhon drug is crucial into perfecting it, and to determine any possible side effects: apart from the change in appearance, of course—

I know what it *does*, Dr Zedaph. [inhale] And I know we asked you to do that. Thank you. What I don't understand, and can't seem to comprehend— why do you treat him like that?

Like what?

A person, Zed. He's a test subject and a prototype, and once the drug is perfected we have methods to dispose of either him or the other one, depending on which is more successful.

Scar— it all seems awfully—

Awfully *what*, Zed? When we hired you, I believed you were strong enough to deal with the real world. Cub didn't. I appealed for you to join this branch, did you know that? The only reason we haven't made you redundant for such a blatant, blatant error is because whatever it is you do, it *works*. The subject shares things with you. You are the closest to a friend that he will ever have in this facility. Do you understand me, Zed?

I do, Scar.

Well! [ping of a switch, crunch of paper entering a shredder] I'm glad we could resolve the matter sensibly.

And so on it goes: Dr Zedaph visits him once a day, or more often, depending on whoever psychological and physiological tests Concorp wished to conduct. After a few days, the shackles around his wrists are untied and the levels of sedative pumped into his bloodstream decrease, and X has a little more autonomy. He plucks at the stitches on his face, his chest, and it goes like this until he falls asleep, and the skin around the wounds gently coalesces, so when he wakes up the next morning the scars are tighter. He still picks at the stitches despite how Dr Zedaph discourages him. It is his own silent, perfect act of rebellion, bed-bound and woozy.

Time drags on, and against his best attempts to prevent them, X's scars heal into fleshy rivulets that leak from his eye socket like the radial spokes of a spider-web.

Dr Zedaph sits patiently in the corner of the room, never without his trusty clipboard, talking when X feels conversation is possible and remaining silent when he wants to be accompanied by the solitary flutter of his heartbeat, and that alone.

Occasionally Dr Zedaph asks him shallow questions, and X replies quietly, either sitting up in bed or pacing around the small room, stretching muscles weak from disuse when the IV finally comes out.

Sometimes it's Dr Zedaph who talks, and X who listens as he recounts his work before Concorp, a group of three tight-knit friends with a singular brain cell ping-ponging between them — ("I *still* don't have it," he admits with a shake of his head and a fond smile), about birds, and butterflies, and how even the humble dandelion brings a splash of colour to any front garden.

And sometimes it's X who says something, and Dr Zedaph who drops everything to listen to him patiently. He doesn't speak much, but his words are raw and cold and twisted by tragedy, of someone who doesn't know any difference from misery; how it is normal. How he learned to read by the labels on vials of hazardous substances, and how he was told to ask nothing, because his world was small and perfect, and that was plenty for two children taught not to question.

This continues similarly for days and weeks that crawl into months, and the little room and hospital bed is so familiar to him that should X close his eye, the image would still be burned onto the back of his retina. He grows restless, doing sit-ups against the bed and sprinting from wall to wall and stretching for his toes, legs splayed on the sterile linoleum floor. His former limberness will take time to regain, but every twinge of aching muscle, every shuddering throb of his heart as sweat drenches his hair, is progress regardless, slow as it may be.

Dr Zedaph's office is warm and brightly furnished. Most of the fittings do not appear to be his choice, however — bare-oiled spruce planks that match the desk and the cabinet only evoke the image of an upper managerial office.

But.

The space in front of his desk is furnished with a woolly faux-sheepskin rug complete with snout, ears and hooves, one glassy marble eye studying the ceiling and the other, the doorway.

X picks his way around it gingerly and upon better judgement, prods it with one foot.

"Oh, don't mind Brian," Dr Zedaph says casually, before gesturing to a leather-backed chair opposite his own.

"... *Brian,*" repeats X.

"Brian," Dr Zedaph confirms. "Now, this is *far* better than your room again, isn't it? Much more comfortable." He nods at the chair again and X follows the line of movement with his head, before making a non-committal hum.

"Anyway!" He claps sharply, and X slides onto the cushioned leather seat. Dr Zedaph's eyes are bright and glistening with water, sharply sparkling in the halogen lights, and there is the tension of a prey-creature prevalent throughout their bulging sclera. There is something about to happen, and X is waiting, and then something *does*.

Dr Zedaph suddenly lunges with an agility X would have not thought him capable of. His hands close around the column of X's throat, locking under his jawbone, and begin to crush inwards.

"You're a *monster*," he snarls, nostrils flaring. "An *abomination*. You'd do us all a favour if you were *gone*."

Despite the words, Dr Zedaph isn't squeezing hard enough to prove fatal. X digs his hands under the psychologist's, levering them away from his throat as he continues pushing forward, crushing him into the back of the chair.

X lets go. Dr Zedaph overbalances, eyes wide, and in the moment of confusion X draws his elbow back and swipes and his knuckles connect with Dr Zedaph's jawbone with a sickening *crunch*.

Time stutters, and X's heart is throbbing through the roots of his teeth.

Dr Zedaph is swaying slightly, and X barely scrambles out of the way before he topples forward into the cradle of his chair, groaning quietly to himself.

X didn't think the punch was that forceful, more a quick jab to put airspace between them.

X slips the keycard from the pouch around his throat, clenching it tightly within one fist. The doors open for him anyway; he won't need it, but it feels more *sensible* to take something from an unconscious person. When he locks the door, Dr Zedaph won't follow him.

It is a matter of minutes before the first alarms begin to shriek. Someone on cams had discovered the unconscious psychologist, no doubt. X breaks into a light-footed, bounding sprint over the sterile linoleum, swerving around corners and cutting through rooms in order to throw the trail, to put several metres of wall and air between him and whatever else is going on. He doesn't know where he is headed in his blind dash through the facility, but he recognises rooms and signs; without their presence each corridor would be indistinguishable from the next.

And he knows that although his path may be meandering, he is *precisely* where he wants to be.

This is one of the experimental weapons storerooms, accessible even without Dr Zedaph's keycard; he slams the door behind him and drags over a crate — full of something explosive, judging by the yellow-and-black illustrations of flying debris — to pin it closed.

Heart juddering in his throat, he snatches a rifle from its holster and a cartridge of bullets; his attack, and hopefully the sight of a rabid prototype would intimidate more if a considerably lethal weapon accompanied him.

There's a suit of lean body armour, red with black and grey accents. He grabs it without hesitating. It's bulletproof, no doubt, and although he is valuable to this institute, he does not wish to *test* how valuable, exactly.

They have Xisuma, X thinks with his jaw locked, and that is enough to snap him out of his thoughts and buckle the chestplate around his ribs, the gauntlets around his pale wrists. If Xisuma is perfect, and he *has* to be— for he is the only other one, the second, the best — would Concorp keep him around as well?

He does not know, but he tightens the plates around his waist with a little more force than necessary.

There is a helmet to accompany it; a sleek, angular piece of dark glass obscures the wearer's eyes, and it is scaled with the same red bulletproof metal that the rest of the armour is built from. He

doesn't know if he would survive a shot to the mess of scars on his chest, now his heart has been relocated, but regardless— the heart needs to remain *safe*.

He feels the waves of warmth pulse through his skull as he clasps the helmet under his chin, pulling the tube of elasticated fabric under the collar of the chestplate.

There is a small, high window at the back of the storeroom; through it gleams a cold shaft of sunlight. With the butt of the rifle X knocks out the glass, then clambers atop a crate of ammunition to wriggle out the gap. It's tight, but his slight form — even with the armour — can still slip through.

He drops to the ground lightly and presses his back to the whitewashed brick wall. His breaths come ragged and fast and his heart feels about to beat out of his skull, and the alarms are still blaring and the air is cold through the fabric parts of the armour and everything echoes within his eardrums to the pulse of his eye socket, *one-two one-two one-two one-two—*

X forces himself to take a shuddering breath, to press close to the wall of this scrubby courtyard and to keep *moving* on trembling legs.

The chain-link gate that blocks the alleyway is rusted shut. X rams into it side-on, hearing the crunch of ancient iron giving under the force of his bodyweight, creaking open with a scream of hinges in want of oil. The shadow he passes through is colder than the brisk sunlight, but beyond it: a final stretch of hard-packed dirt scattered with thistles, merging with sun-worn tarmac.

X steps into the sunlight that now streams over his visor, turning the reflective surface of his armour into a beacon of golden light. He hitches the gun under his arm and sprints over to the fence, ignoring the piercing screech of the sirens that penetrates even the insulation of his helmet.

He— he *trusted* Dr Zedaph. And then he'd tried to strangle him.

Why?

X is sifting through thoughts in a thick, murky soup of bewilderment. No-one is following him, so he adheres to the present, and the tarmac beneath his feet, and the lobby doors on the west side of the building. Ancient cars crumble in parking spaces wrought with weeds. He can barely determine the lines on the ground which mark their boundaries.

No-one has come to stop him.

X strolls towards the entrance of the car park; beyond it lies a gravelly driveway, around half a kilometre in length: and then the open, roaring motorway that leads to the city on both sides.

No-one has come.

He hears the reception's doors crunch together behind him, adorned with gleaming Concorp insignia: not the façade of a company manufacturing chemicals and aerosols and other surreptitious experiments on people, for the better of the world— but more like a dentist's office, or a modern doctor's surgery, if it weren't for the masses of smoke and hulking, rusted pipework spilling from the sides of the huge building.

He does not take a single glance back, and instead starts to walk.

The gate at the end of the driveway clanks open without him needing the keycard.

Several hours in, along the side of the motorway with his head hunched into his armour to prevent

tyre-grit spattering the helmet, he continues to mull it over, dissecting the conversations, the time spent, the sudden flux of emotion.

And how if Dr Zedaph truly intended to kill, he would have acted sooner, when X was bed-bound. He would have pressed harder. His neck isn't even bruised, not even a bluish shadow beneath his scaled, papery skin.

He continues to walk, as copy-paste suburbs begin to rear their roofs on sundown's event horizon and the light flicks off, as traffic wanes to solitary cars sputtering back to the city.

He continues to think.

(The facility stops releasing smoke. Soon, gushing out of the pipework comes a dense, syrupy cloud of a white gas like fine sugar, carried by the breeze over countryside, roads, houses. It clogs the throat and eyes, and bears the cloying taste of licorice.)

End Notes

So! This took longer than I expected, but I hope that you enjoyed it!

Also. pspsp there are a few references in this,

1) 0350 (X's number) refers to the first ep. they appeared in ('Evil Inside')

2) 'Typhon' is a greek monster: quite literally the King of Monsters, which I thought fit rather well with this AU!

Also this fic features many of my headcanons for the stuffed bird AU; feel free to ask me about them, I don't know if they're particularly clear in the story but they sure are There.

Thank you!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!