

Imposter Syndrome

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/42699648) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/42699648>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Hermitcraft SMP
Character:	welsknight , HelsKnight , Grian , ImpulseSV
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - The Magnus Archives Fusion , not!them - Freeform , identity theft (literal) , Psychological Horror , related to the aforementioned identity theft , Transcript Format , Doppelganger
Language:	English
Series:	Part 38 of From the Archives
Collections:	Hermitcraft x TMA fics
Stats:	Published: 2022-10-29 Words: 2,302 Chapters: 1/1

Imposter Syndrome

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

Summary

[GRIAN]

Impulse isn't in yet today, so I can't bother him about the whole... Tango Tek thing yet. And in the meantime, I'm- talking to Zedaph the other day took a lot out of me, for some reason. I had a full night of sleep and I still feel sort of tired.

So... (*paper rustling*) ...oh, right, this one. This'll work. Statement of... Wels Knight, regarding a case of stolen identity. Original statement transcribed May 5th, 2019. Statement begins.

Notes

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

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(*Papers shuffling*)

[GRIAN]

Impulse isn't in yet today, so I can't bother him about the whole... Tango Tek thing yet. And in the meantime, I'm- talking to Zedaph the other day took a lot out of me, for some reason. I had a full night of sleep and I still feel sort of tired.

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[GRIAN (STATEMENT)]

And you're *sure* I haven't already come through today? Really?

That's surprising. No, I believe you, just-

It's a long story. You'll understand once you hear me explain.

So, I have a horse. She's lovely, a beautiful steady creature, and I got her- I'm not ashamed to say this- because I've always been fascinated by knights. Not that much of a surprise, with my last name. I grew out of it a bit as I got older, but to this day I make a hobby of Ren Faire jousts and historical broadsword classes. And I have a horse.

When everything... happened, I was keeping her on a ranch out south of the city, since I *worked* an office job. The owner took care of her day-to-day and used her for riding lessons in exchange for charging me less to stable her, and I would deal with anything more specific to do with her care, which included taking her to the farrier to get her horseshoes changed.

Over a few visits, the farrier and I got to know each other pretty well, and one day she agreed to let me come over and watch her work at her anvil. Blacksmithing's always been bundled up with knights in my head, so I've always been interested; even daydreamed a bit about getting into it myself, on long days at work. I guess I did a lot of that, daydreaming.

After a few hours, when I still hadn't lost interest, she offered to teach me some basics. She moved the horseshoe she'd just finished and wiped off the top of her anvil with an oilcloth, and I finally got a good look at it.

Honestly, it was... pretty. It looked like a work of art- more embellished than I would've expected. Under the wear and grime of years of use, I could make out carved designs that ran down the sides and to the base, circles and lines and curlicues that looked vaguely like people. It looked more like something that should be in a museum than something I should be hitting with a hammer. I asked her where she'd even gotten it, and she shrugged and said it'd been in the workshop since before she inherited it.

She showed me how to stand, then handed me her spare hammer so I could get a feel for the weight and motion before there was a horseshoe in the way.

I shuffled around a bit, trying my best to imitate her, and then swung the hammer down. It hit the anvil with an impact that jolted all the way up to my shoulders, and a sound that made my ears ring.

Nothing happened, for a moment, but when I tried to move, to lift the hammer and swing it again, I couldn't. And that *sound* seemed to just... *hang* in the air, like electricity.

Then, slowly, like it was *unfolding* from the anvil, some collection of lines and angles pulled itself together into a... shape. Almost human-looking, but sketchy, two-dimensional. The color a person is when you can only see them out of the corner of your eye. I couldn't have told you anything else about it if I had a picture. It was just... there. Unfinished, or maybe undefined, or maybe just sort of smudged, crouched on top of the anvil right where my hammer had come down.

It reached up the shaft, and touched my hand.

It was cold at first, like metal, but within seconds it had warmed up to body temperature. It felt like a person was touching me, and not some... statue, or suit of armor, or... *thing*. The lines touching my fingers widened, slowly, gained definition, although the skin was paler than mine and the nails

were... purple, almost red.

Then the arms. Muscle wrote itself onto white bone, skin stitched itself over that. I still couldn't move- I really *couldn't* .

Its eyes were last. They were brown, almost red. It looked at me, and grinned.

It opened its mouth, and whatever was behind its *teeth* -

I think I got very lucky. My friend the farrier brought something heavy down on its head, and my hammer jerked up and hit it in the chin. Whatever spell was on me broke; I lost my balance, staggered back, almost cracked my head open on the concrete wall behind me. The... *thing* ... crumpled, not bleeding, and fled out the open workshop door.

I sat down. Collapsed might be the better word. For a while we just sat and stared at each other.

She drove me home. We didn't talk about it. What would there even be to say? I don't even know what I thought happened.

It... I think I hoped it that would be the end of it. I sort of figured I must've hit my head worse than I'd thought, or inhaled some fumes or something- there's lead and mercury everywhere, in those old places- and I'd just... thought I'd seen something I hadn't.

But of course it wasn't that simple.

The next day I went to work, because- well, it was a Monday, and head injury or not, they'd notice if I wasn't there. I work- *worked* - in accounting for a pretty big firm. *Slightly* soul-crushing, but it paid the bills, so.

But that morning, I got in, and the receptionist didn't recognize me.

I need you to understand: I'd worked there for eight years, and she was there the whole time. I *knew* her. I knew her name and the fact that she had a bad breakup last year and the- the name of her *dog* , even, but she just smiled at me like I was a complete stranger and asked if I had an appointment.

I said *no* , obviously I *worked* there, and I gave her my name in case she'd somehow forgotten me, but she just frowned and said, 'Mr. Knight has already signed in for the day. Are you a relative?'

I said I *was* Mr. Knight, and *whatever* was up in my office wasn't *me* - and I don't know if it was what I said or how I said it, but her whole face just closed off and I saw her reach down under her desk where I knew the button was to call security. Like I really was just... some weird stranger who'd wandered in off the street, like I hadn't been at her *house* last New Years. It felt... surreal. Like I was in a nightmare.

I should've just left, but it still didn't feel *real* . I told her the whole story, like if I got it all out fast enough she'd finally remember who I was and throw the imposter out.

That's not what happened, though. Obviously. What *happened* was security came and hauled me out.

I got this awful prickling feeling on the back of my neck as they were bundling me out the doors. I glanced back over my shoulder, up to where the office windows overlooked the lobby, and I *saw* it, just for a second. The copy. It was staring down at me, grinning like it was watching the world's funniest show.

And then I was outside. The security officer told me that they'd let me off with a warning this time, but if I was caught on the premises again the company would press charges. I didn't argue.

I spent the rest of that day calling every contact in my phone. My coworkers, my friends, my *family* - none of them even recognized my voice. Most of them didn't pick up- at least one who did thought I was a spam caller, even though my contact *should've* been in all of their phones. None of them knew me. Not my sister, not my drinking buddies, not my boss.

It was like... all of a sudden, my life had been handed over to a bad copy of myself, and somehow nobody except me had even noticed.

I gave up, eventually, and went home. Figured I would get some sleep, and see if things made any more sense in the morning. I thought maybe if I was really lucky, that hit to my head had scrambled me way worse than I thought, and in the morning everything would be normal again. Or I'd be dead of a brain bleed, which would solve the problem too, I guess.

As it turned out, I didn't get that far. I got home, and the lights were on inside my apartment.

The door was unlocked.

I let myself in, as quietly as I could. I went straight to the kitchen, first, to grab one of the knives. I wasn't sure if I was prepared to *use* it- I didn't even know if it would work against that... *thing* . But I felt better having something in my hand, even if it was just a vegetable knife.

The copy was sitting in my living room, waiting for me.

It was the first time I'd gotten a really good look at it, fully formed. It didn't really look like me at all, was the thing. It was paler, different hair, darker eyes. It looked like it could have been... I don't know, my cousin, or something, but not me. There was a divot along its jawline, right where I'd hit it with the hammer, that almost looked dented, and it made all of the features look a little... knocked out of alignment? I don't know how else to describe it.

It grinned, when it saw me, and said, 'Coming into someone else's home uninvited is trespassing, you know.'

I know it was just trying to get a rise out of me. That didn't make it any easier to stay calm when this *thing* had hijacked my whole *life*.

I shouted at it, told it to get out of my house, to stop looking like me, to just- *leave me alone* . It didn't seem fazed, though- just heaved this big irritated sigh, like *I* was being unreasonable.

It said, 'You're lucky, you know. Normally whoever lets me out would be consumed in the process, and that would be it! But since you made such a *mess* , now we're stuck like this. *Great* job.'

It had a phone in its hand, and it held it up so I could see the screen- it had the emergency services number pulled up. It held a finger over the call button, and grinned at me.

'Anyways,' it said, 'I don't know who you are, but you better get out of my apartment.'

I didn't- you know, maybe I could've tackled it fast enough to stop it from hitting the button, knocked the phone out of its hand and shoved the knife into its throat. Maybe. But I didn't know... I didn't even know if it *could* be hurt in a way that would keep it down. And I didn't want to risk it, not then. Maybe that makes me a coward, I don't know.

So I told it that this wasn't over. And I left.

I could hear it laughing, as I went.

Now... I don't know what to do.

I guess I could just go somewhere else. Pick a new name, start over. I don't think it would *follow* me. It's already taken what it wanted. But I don't think I can. It feels too much like it would be just giving up. I'm not just gonna step back and let a *bad photocopy* steal my whole life and everything I worked for.

And it's not like I even *liked* everything in my old life. I didn't like my job, I didn't always get along with my family... but those things were still *mine!* It was *my* job, *my* family!

...There was one thing I did manage to salvage, though.

I stole the horse.

Well, I say *stole* - I left a check for the owner of the ranch, and everything- but I did sneak onto the property and take her without asking. She was just... the one thing I absolutely couldn't stomach the thought of the copy getting its hands on.

I guess the next step is to find a new place to stable her, and a reliable place to sleep. I just... needed to get all of this out to someone who wouldn't look at me like I was insane, first.

There is still one contact left on my phone I haven't tried. The farrier, whose forge I was at when all this started- after the copy first emerged, she still knew who I was. Drove me home. But I'm not sure if that means she still knows me now, or if it just hadn't had time to finish... erasing me yet, then.

I should call her. I'm just...

Honestly, I'm scared to find out.

[Click]

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[GRIAN]

-still?

[IMPULSE]

Yeah, I dunno? I guess he's just got the flu or something. He's been calling in, so he's definitely, you know- *alive*.

[GRIAN]

(Doubtfully) I guess it is flu season... how'd he sound on the phone? Fine?

[IMPULSE]

Uh, a little weird, I guess? I think his head's probably just stuffed up.

[GRIAN]

Hm. Right.

... *Anyways* , what I *actually* wanted to ask you about- what's this about you meeting Tango Tek and *not telling me?*

[Click]

End Notes

the first half of this fic was written by zeph! because i was completely unable to get my brain moving on it. thank you zeph ilu

anyways, happy (early) halloween!! hope yall are all having a wonderful spooky season. it's very weird for me to think i've been writing this series since spring and now it's nearly november. and the next statement is gonna be number 40 in the series!! that's wild as hell

speaking of halloween, there is gonna be a very exciting from the archives-related announcement in just a couple days! maybe consider following me on twitter (@sixteenthdays) or tumblr (@sixteenth-days) to make sure you don't miss it?

also shoutout to the various friends irl who now know about this fic btw. yall know who you are, if you've actually read this far

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