

# Numbered

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Submitted: July 17, 2006  
Updated: September 21, 2006

*Worlds are being destroyed, and once again Riku finds himself wrapped up in a mission to save them. Now Riku must pursue Malificent through strange new worlds with a partner he could live without, while trying to find the answers to his existence. Oneside*

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# 1 - Alone

The bustling expanse of metal skyscrapers and paved streets, of commerce and shops, business and trade, lies, disloyalty, deception, and deceit, was gone.

Silver City was gone, and all that remained was its empty steel and cement facade. The tiny lights still blinked in merry colors, even after the sun had dimmed out of existence, the radios still screeched from speakers knocked askew, though it had been three days since another human voice had been heard, for now she wandered through static silence. Steel still spiraled into the air, final testaments to humanity, thought no longer supporting floors or window, only fragments of glass and clumps of plaster. Fires still burnt over the horizon, the world in its final attempts to cleanse itself and begin anew.

Even though she knew it was dead. The world was too far gone, and the darkness was too far deep. The damage had been done, and she was the only one who remained.

The wind howled darkly through the empty streets, picking up litter and tossing it about as she stumbled through the remaining debris. It was difficult, for every street was congested with empty cars, and every sidewalk with fallen remains.

Yet there were no people. No bodies, no evidence, the world was empty.

Still she continued moving, with a gun holstered across her chest in a belt that had proved too big for her hips, and a sword and scabbard swinging jauntily through one of her belt loops. Arms had been her first priority.

Food, shelter, and possible company, was her second. Scrambling over a nearby parked car, she ducked behind the front wheel just in time to watch a pool of darkness pass where moments ago her feet had been.

These creatures filled the streets now, strange shadowy creatures that defied all law and reason. Able to climb up from the ground, and melt again in a pool of dark-matter, to vanish all together, and reappear at will. They ate people, that much to her was certain, but whether her weapons would work against them, she didn't know.

She had no intention of finding out. When she was sure the coast was clear, she stood, slowly, up from her hiding place, and studied the empty streets once more. In the distance she could hear a church bell ringing.

It was amazing how much you could hear, when the world around you was empty. Carefully she began the trek, following the sound as it rose above the crackling static and stifling waves of silence. Every so often stopping as though expecting another shadow to leap up and attack her. But nothing did, and before long she was sitting, alone, in one of the pews. It wasn't long before she fell asleep.

When she awoke, an hour or so later, to the loud echoes of the bells above, she was not alone. The shadows pooled and swayed around the fringe, in the thin strip of walkway at the end of the pews. From above, they formed a perfect rectangle, she was sure, and yet they did not move any closer.

Her heart began to beat a little faster, a little heavier, as her hand slowly traveled to the hilt of her sword.

From above the bell tolled its final note, and fell into silence.

The shadows all froze, and in that one tense moment she remembered watching infinity.

The world had held its breath.

Triggered, the creatures sprung at her, and even as she screamed and ducked beneath the wooden pews they dived below to grab her. She tried to claw her way across the marble tiles, but her ankles had been caught, and squirm as she might, their grasp did not weaken. From above they angled down, with another scream she ducked back under, kicking and crying as she freed her gun and screwed shut her eyes.

Tears poured down her pale face as she pulled the trigger. She emptied the chamber, her ears ringing now as she opened her eyes in hopes of seeing damage.

One of the shadows swooped forward and knocked the empty gun from her hand. Another claimed her wrist, and as she began to flounder and flail, dragged her across the floor.

She couldn't scream, but she was sure that in her terror her heart's thunderous beats could be heard as it bleated and blared its frantic message in the long and short intervals of morse-code. Arching her back and throwing her weight from side to side she managed to knock over one of the gold plated candle sticks that adorned the altar as they passed. It clattered loud enough to startle the specters, but not enough to warrant her escape. It only enraged them.

The one who had been holding her wrists dug its long ghostly fingers into her hair and seized a great chunk of it in its fist.

Again she would have screamed, but the angered ghost would hear nothing of it. Grasping and pulling as hard as it could, it lifted her head and brought it crashing back down against the floor. Once more, darkness swam before her eyes, and very soon consumed her vision.

## 2 - Healing

His eyes could not lie, though he tried desperately to hide his feelings. Those dangerously tangible and tangled things, lurking behind the curtain of long silver hair he had cultivated before his eyes. Such a mask was a meager defense, for every small gust of wind, the quick swipe of a hand, or the very act of brushing those bangs before his face, betrayed his motives.

He smiled and shook his head, but his eyes would always reflect what he didn't want them to know. The guilt they misunderstood, the pain they misread, they knew him better than himself, and yet they didn't know him well enough.

True, his feelings for Kairi were deep enough to scare and scar him, but he accepted that he would never be able to love her like Sora did. While the three of them shared a bond stronger than any other, the connection between the two of them was the strongest. Not even the legendary power of the paopu fruit could compare.

He pushed his hair from his eyes, only to have it swing back in place as he leaned against the base of his favorite tree.

It hurt him sometimes to see them so close, but he tried not to linger too long on it. Though things may change between them, he knew they would always have room in their hearts for him.

So when they sat close together, or when they laughed and swatted playfully at the small amount of space between themselves, he knew, one glance at him, at his eyes, could ruin the delicate strings that held the three together. His feelings, his treacherous feelings, were out in the open, but nothing could lessen the pain, nor hide their quick glances, their secretive shy smiles, their lingering hands, just as nothing could hide the tiny amount of painful guilt he tried so hard to bury within his chest.

His eyes could not lie, even when he insisted he felt nothing when his friend first approached him. The boy remained skeptical, staring up at the taller teen as though expecting to see something, and perhaps he had. The question had been hypothetical of course, Sora had assured him with a laugh, a nervous chuckle, and they continued their lives.

Again running a hand through his bangs he released an aggravated sigh, knowing that somewhere, probably in their own home, Sora and Kairi were thinking of each other and beginning to drive him mad.

Watching them blush and laugh nervously as they quickly glanced away from each other was laughable, but it made him feel mad with guilt and frustration all the same.

He was jealous of their relationship, and afraid he was going to be left behind.

His eyes could not lie, to his friends or to himself.

Something had to be done. The anxiety that began to spread through his restless body upon the arrival

of nightfall was beginning to stir within his being, and he knew it was time. Within his hand he clutched a bottle, the love of his two best friends possibly sealed beneath the cork along with his fate. Pushing himself up off the tree, he pulled back his arm, and flung the bottle as far as he could out into the sea.

In the light of the setting sun all he could see was its tiny shimmering shape as it bobbed and ducked beneath the waves, and finally disappeared.

His eyes could not lie, nor could they hide the wounds that had yet to heal. He had redeemed himself, been freed from the darkness, but there was still more he felt he could do.

He planned to find himself, and maybe, for them and for himself find a way to heal.