

Xan Travis Backstory

Name: Went by “Alex Patterson” as a child. Since his adolescence prefers to go by “Xan”, and as a young adult, changed his surname by deed poll to Travis. He also goes by his hacker handle, Travi591 (the 5 is leet speak for “s”, and the 91 is to give a false hint as to his year of birth, which is in fact 1981)

Species: Human

Sex: ♂

Orientation: Pansexual

Age: 37

Birthday: 23/06/1981

Height: 6ft 0in

Weight: 185lbs

Siblings: 1 sister, Elizabeth (often shortened to “Liz”), 3 years younger

Profession: Hacker, specialising in targeting gambling businesses

Xan is an original character, and part of the Mirath timeline. His father was a gambling addict, and this addiction tore his family apart when he was a child. Since then he has been determined to take revenge against the gambling businesses that exploit those people addicted to gambling, and to protect the most seriously affected wherever he can. He is a hacker, and a happier person to look at than becomes apparent when you get to know him more deeply: he has a can-do, up-beat attitude and a love of Hawaiian shirts.

Trust & Confidence

(newborn)

To understand the circumstances in which Alex grew up, it is important to understand his parents’ situation prior to his birth.

During their first few dates, Alex’s father wooed his mother with expensive dinner dates, gifts, trips to the theatre, weekend breaks, and other expensive luxuries. For him, being a man meant providing for his lady. Alex’s mum assumed that his dad was indeed capable of providing this standard of living so didn’t worry about the money he was spending. This situation presented them with no noticeable problems to start with, and only began to fester very slowly. He also had a fondness for gambling that often went beyond fun and into compulsion. As Alex’s father’s bank balance went from the black to the red, he kept the issue to himself and continued to spend in the hope of covering up his financial problem. He also covered the stress he felt by being upbeat, positive, and larger-than-life.

By the time Alex was born, his parents were working class to lower middle class. His father would continue to accrue debt over the following years but keep his financial problems from his family.

Alex was the first of his parents’ children. As a result, his mum was inexperienced in looking after children, but with the financial support and apparent confidence of her partner, she felt tentatively confident herself.

Freedom & Self-Determination

(toddlerhood)

Alex's mother had hit her stride in motherhood by the time he became a toddler. Having a toddler around came with challenges that infancy didn't, but she eased into it quite well. A little while after Alex's second birthday she fell pregnant again.

Alex became aware of the presence of his father, and became fascinated, as most toddlers do, with this icon of maleness. Alex's father was outgoing, loud, confident, even brash, and Alex lapped this up! He himself quickly learned how to be vocal about his likes and dislikes, to be bright and positive just like his dad, and to take up space in any room he entered.

His father bought things - presents for his wife and Alex, furniture, electronics, and made sure he had an impressively new and attractive car at all times. He loved his possessions and Alex picked up on this too. Alex was always likely to have been possessive at this age, since as a toddler he was beginning to differentiate himself from his mum so wanted to keep things he considered his - from material objects to new traits that he discovered.

While his father was busy playing the role of 'fun, generous dad', his mum had her work cut out trying to keep Alex relatively boundaried - to make sure he had a sensible bed time, didn't eat too much sugar, wound down for the day at the best possible time, and so on. She did all of these things with the best of intentions, of course, but they set her up against Alex's father and for a while, she felt trapped in the role of 'big bad mummy'. Alex colluded with this as, naturally, he enjoyed the freedoms, sweets, gifts, and excitements his dad provided.

Overall however, his mum kept his world in pretty good order.

As Alex began to graduate on to young childhood and all that that entailed, his mum gave birth again. This time she had a girl, whom she and Alex's father named Elizabeth.

Ambition

(young childhood)

It was time for Alex to start going to pre-school. He went to one of the 'better ones', as his father assured his mother that they could afford it. It was a great time for him - he got to meet lots of other children of his age, and his bright personality made him a fun playmate.

Alex had enjoyed boats and ships whenever he saw them in books and loved his nautical-themed toys, and whenever the subject of what he wanted to be as a grown-up came up, he would always say that he wanted to be a captain! Whether or not he could have articulated this was one thing, but he loved the sense of glamour and prestige, and the potential for fun that globe-trotting presented.

The nifty captain's hat probably didn't hurt, either.

Liz grew into a toddler, and that made her more interesting as she became more than just a boring bundle that his mother attended to. As ever, he took his cue from his dad (who clearly doted on his two children) and enjoyed the fun his sister represented. Sometimes he could be a little boisterous, but his mum was always there to make sure Elizabeth didn't come to harm.

Productivity

(older childhood)

School became more structured as Alex reached his 7th year, and with it, the work became more focused and harder. Alex felt very ready for this. His awareness of the trappings of a luxurious life, and the work required to sustain it, was not lost on him. Full of the work ethic his dad had instilled in him (after all, his dad spent a lot of hours away from home), he embraced the work, believing that if he worked hard then he could achieve anything he wanted - whether that was captaincy of a ship or anything else. There were these people called stockbrokers and trust fund managers, after all, and they made obscene amounts of money...

That sounded a little too boring. Nevertheless, the idea of aiming high was clear in Alex's mind and he worked hard to make sure that whatever he ended up wanting to do, he would be able to do it. If nothing else he wanted to make his dad proud.

When Alex was around 8 years old, he started using the family computer more. He also began to notice stories on the evening news about computer viruses bringing big companies to their knees, starting with the hysterical media reporting of the Michelangelo virus. That caught Alex's attention: who was creating these viruses, and why?

Perhaps this wouldn't have caught his interest as much if his father hadn't accidentally given off subtle signals that he wasn't being completely honest with his family. Alex's mum said nothing but began to feel uneasy about the family finances, so she began to demonstrate an unspoken sense of tension. Alex himself was already so used to his dad's ways that he simply considered his father's personality normal. Not only did he simply not think to mention his dad's dishonesty to anyone (after all, everyone's dad was confident but mysterious, right?), he also mimicked it without giving it any thought.

Either way, the design and use of computer viruses, and other hacking practices, was the perfect way for him to achieve that mimicry. He was a bright child, keen enough on his studies in school to be able to apply them elsewhere in his life, and this helped him to teach himself the fundamentals of hacking.

Within the next year or so, Alex started to become more consciously aware that something wasn't quite right between his parents. They seemed tense, but he couldn't make sense of it as he couldn't see what was wrong.

His father was spending more time away from home than he previously had. Even his trips to the local shop for milk and bread took longer than they should have done. He would often spend a couple of hours away while running such an errand. Alex only realised that this was odd when his mother started mentioning it, but as soon as she did, he couldn't help but notice whenever it happened again.

Home became a tense place: Alex's dad was becoming entrenched enough in his addiction that he could no longer keep up the facade as well as he once had. He funnelled all of his wages into gambling, leaving little to none for the family to live off. When Alex's mother tried to raise this with his father, he denied it and tried to charm her into forgiving him, but his act no longer worked as well as it had - even less so when there was no money to buy groceries or pay the bills. A hungry family could not easily be appeased.

Alex became more and more involved with online hacking communities, keen to distract himself from the increasingly common arguments that happened at home. When he wasn't on the computer, he was thinking about ways to trick people into giving up vital information such as passwords and other sensitive information.

In all of this, nobody paid that much attention to Liz. Her mother continued to look after her, of course, and she desperately wanted to make sure the family stayed together and safe. One day, after a particularly testy exchange between Alex's mum and dad, his dad offered to take the kids out for a walk in the park to give his wife some quiet time and to prove that he could still be a good dad.

He took Alex and Liz to the local park, which had a big lake at its centre. While walking around its perimeter he and Alex got talking, and while they were both distracted Liz fell into the lake. Father and son were so engrossed in their conversation that they were nearly 30 minutes into their discussion - and a long way around the edge of the lake - before they noticed Liz was missing.

When they realised, they retraced their steps, desperately searching for her, but by the time they found her, the six-year old girl had drowned.

This had a devastating effect on the family. Alex's father retreated further into the escapism of gambling. His wife, in agony with grief, went into a kind of mental survival mode where she tried keeping the finances, household, her marriage, and her remaining child - not to mention her job and friendship network - functioning. Alex blamed himself but mimicked his father in immersing himself ever deeper into his distraction of choice - hacking, which helped him to focus on something other than the loss of his sister, while also giving him an outlet for his rage whenever he needed one.

Hacking, it turned out, could be an excellent tool for revenge.

Alex decided at this time that he wanted to change his name, and altered his diminutive to Xan. While rationally he couldn't account for why he wanted to do this, it seemed to mark the enormous changes that had happened in his life. Liz had chosen to use the diminutive "Liz", which was the shortest possible version of Elizabeth; a while after Xan had chosen to change his name, he made the connection. Satisfied that he was remembering her in a way, he decided to keep the name Xan.

The family remained physically together for a few more years, but it was essentially broken, as the trust between most family members had been betrayed. This was the emotional landscape in which Alex moved into adolescence.

Child to Adult Transition (*adolescence*)

When Xan was around 13, his parents separated. Xan lived with his mum and occasionally saw his dad, but it became more and more obvious that his dad was in a very poor mental place.

His living space, whenever Xan saw it, was pretty plain and bleak. Xan was only a young teenager and had enough changes within his own person to cope with, so he didn't know where

to start when it came to supporting his dad. The grimness of his dad's new home (if it could really be called a home) left its own impression on him.

This may be why, when Xan grew a little older, he came to favour Hawaiian shirts. Not only were they brighter and more cheerful to look at, but they represented relaxation, holidays, and a far-away exotic place.

Xan managed to continue quite well with his school work, and focused on it as a way to cope. He also continued to refine his hacking skills. He started using them to investigate his school's computer system. Soon he began to quietly offer his services to other students: the removal or adjustment of certain disciplinary or exam records, delivery of test answers, and other such work.

Xan developed excellent flirting skills as a side effect of his hacking activities, and as a result was very successful when it came to dating. He liked making new connections with others for networking reasons, and charmed them enough to trust him. Once people felt easy around him he either offered his hacking services or asked for help or resources. Many school mates helped him get access to various systems, allowed him to use their accounts, and all sorts of other things. His lack of apparent focus on sex also attracted school mates who liked the fact that he wasn't obsessed with it and didn't seem to have unhealthy attitudes towards it. Overall, it paid off very well for him and he rarely had difficulty getting a date when he wanted one.

Once he cottoned on that his networking skills translated well as flirting skills he wasn't averse to using them, not one bit, but by the time he did, they had become well-honed, easy-going, playful, and effective.

He didn't have much in the way of role models. Instead Xan took his own path and guided himself as best he could. This suited him: he liked to do things on the quiet, after all, and having a role model could potentially mean being found out. Perhaps under different circumstances he would have had his father as a role model, and in a sense he did - he hadn't forgotten his dad's larger than life approach to life back before the family had fallen apart. Now Xan felt like the man of the house, and as such he felt that it was his responsibility to take the lead.

Aside from his growing range of hacking contacts - both fellow hackers and customers - he also had friends at school. He favoured anarchic people: those who were prepared to break the rules to help out those in need, who had a sense of fairness but lacked rose-tinted glasses. That latter point became all the truer as the next big disaster occurred in his life.

While actively supporting his dad was too difficult for him, he could do something else. He considered keeping tabs on his dad the next best thing, and he did this with the use of his hacking skills. His dad had already admitted to his family that he had a gambling problem, but this showed Xan the full extent of his dad's addiction.

His dad had dozens of accounts with different gambling companies. Their practices were shady: the deals they offered him clearly enticed him to have 'just one more go' over and over in search of that big win (or at least to recover what he had lost). They defaulted their default bets too high, so that a hapless gambler might not notice he was gambling £5 per spin. They reneged on their own terms and conditions when it suited them. Looking at it, Xan found their behaviour utterly sickening.

Not too long after his parents had separated, his father stopped calling or visiting all together and no longer answered his calls or texts. That worried Xan and he went to his dad's flat to check on him.

On arrival he discovered that his father had committed suicide. By the time he ended his life, he was in six figures of debt (and yet, the gambling companies didn't show any signs of stopping - they had no safety measures in place to stop addicted customers like Xan's dad. They seemed to feel that responsibility lay fully with the addict, and Xan could see that this was entirely unworkable for the addict.

All of this was highly profitable for the companies.

Sickened by the blood on their hands and devastated all over again by the idea that a family member had met a grisly end while he wasn't looking, Xan decided to screw over the gambling companies in an act of revenge.

He spent large chunks of time during his teenage years attacking, refining his method of attack, and attacking again. Xan preferred the subtle approach - subterfuge over obvious attacks.

One of his tactics was to 'curse' particular roles within the gambling business' payroll. Just as he had with his father, he identified, and monitored, the individuals or teams tasked with working on the probabilities that the gambling companies used to set their odds, tinkering with their work so that every statistician who worked with them seemed to make a lot of mistakes. Person after person was sacked, until these roles appeared to be cursed.

He didn't just attack the gambling web sites; he sought to protect their most vulnerable targets, too. He created temporary pop ups to appear only for the most compulsive gamblers, telling them during gameplay that they had been playing for a long time and should stop and do something else, warning them that their families were suffering or warning of what could happen if they continued, or showing them local support group forums, therapists, or other forms of support.

He siphoned off money - not at the point that gamblers put money into the system, but from other accounts held by the gambling companies - their pay rolls, bonus and tax funds, and other sources.

Closeness in Relationships

(young adulthood)

As a young adult, Xan made the decision to legally change his surname. He had become quite the anarchist during his growing years, and the idea of his name being something he could change just like he changed his socks, appealed to him.

Xan spent a lot of time on hacking forums, and was a respected member there given his level of experience and expertise, along with his specialist knowledge in the workings of gambling web sites. This was where he first met Donnie Mirath.

Donnie, being one of a family of thieves and with a particular interest in cybercrime, was very interested in the potential that plundering gambling web sites offered. While he was researching

this, he saw Xan's posts and followed along with his forum output for a while, as well as reading through his post history. Eventually he introduced himself.

They worked together for a while, tentatively and only online at first, but they found that they liked each other. They worked well together, enjoyed the rebelliousness of hacking, and both had specific goals in mind so appreciated each others' focus. Mutual respect and shared experience gradually led to friendship, and at last they met in person. Once they had done that, physical attraction entered the picture and they began a casual affair, one that bordered on coupledness.

In time, Donnie told his older brother, John, about Xan. He saw potential in working with Xan to boost the Mirath empire's profits and power, and John effectively led the empire.

John had a naturally protective attitude towards his empire (and to his younger brother) and decided to check out Xan himself.

John decided on a very characteristic way of doing this: he contacted Xan and insisted that they rob a casino together. For John, this was a power play. He understood very well that Xan felt more comfortable attacking casinos from behind a screen. He wanted to see how he handled himself in the middle of the action.

Xan did not like this direct approach: an indirect approach had always suited him better. That was his familiar territory and he felt safer being indirect. He argued against John's proposal, and John responded by giving Xan an ultimatum: if he didn't do the robbery with him, then Xan could never see Donnie again.

John had enough of a talent for scaring people, including grown men, that Xan decided it was in his interests to comply. Robbing a casino furnished with a security presence presented less of a perceived threat as far as he was concerned, than trying to fly under the radar with Donnie at the risk of displeasing John.

The robbery was almost chaotic in its execution. John was impatient to start and barely gave Xan the time to turn off the security cameras before he barreled in. As soon as John got inside he forced open every drawer he could find, taking their contents if they looked valuable and leaving carnage in his wake.

Xan saw the mess John made even as he made it, and once they'd left the building, he confronted John about it.

Xan achieved absolutely nothing with this. However, John gave his permission for Xan to work with the Miraths to help with the building of their empire, and to keep his close relationship with Donnie.

Occasionally Xan and Donnie argue, and it's usually about their moral dissonance. Xan is determined to do good with his approach to hacking: to take Robin Hood-style revenge on the gambling companies and protect the addicted people as much as he can. Donnie just wants to make money. Xan also feels uncomfortable with the Miraths' trading of harder drugs; Xan has quite a lingering sore spot when it comes to exploiting addictions, which is very understandable.

Xan also has some difficulty with understanding why Donnie lets John be as aggressive, cocky, and amoral as he is, and this can lead to some tension between himself and Donnie too.

Passing on Responsibilities

(older adulthood)

As positive as Xan's outlook appears to be on the surface, he has some deep misgivings about bringing a new generation of children into the world. He will likely never have any.

He feels more positive about his professional life however. Xan will continue to be a career hacker and to accept others' requests for him to tutor, mentor, or otherwise guide them in improving their own hacking skills. In this way he will be able to assure the continuing fight for the protection of vulnerable people online even after he's no longer able to do it himself.

End of Life

(old age)

Like everybody else, Xan will eventually reach the end of his life. His life goal is to protect vulnerable people, especially those who are too sick to help themselves as a result of addiction. This is not the kind of goal one person can achieve alone, so Xan truly needs others to pick up the responsibility in order to feel that he has made the mark he wants to make in the world.

Thankfully, he is doing that, whether or not he realises that his happiness at the end of his life will depend on it. One thing is for sure, though: Xan will continue playing Robin Hood for as long as he possibly can.

Credits

Based on theory by:

Erikson, E., (1951) 'Childhood and Society', W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. chapter 7.

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