

Prologue

It was 100AR, the first century had past in the new timeline set accordingly by man. The New Year brought nothing new, same trends followed, war, death, deception. But what was special was Mars, the crimson planet offered new possibilities for man, but it too was tainted by our fixation on greed, and power. Instead of joining forces to venture out to find new more powerful resources countries turned to fight against one another for dominance on the red planet. It wasn't long that the developed MFs by Genesis were brought to Mars to aide both sides in advancement. And yet, still neither side profited more than the other. In the midst of all of this came an enigma, a mystery named Chimera. It was a hybrid, a cross between a human and a machine in order to create the most power and hopefully controllable pilot ever in existence. There was a mistake and the pilot raged out of control and destroyed everything in its path. That was until two brothers, Adam and Stephen Novus intervened.

As the web of deception drew thin both of these brothers learned of the Chimera's path only to realize that the pilot was their own older brother, Nicholas. Regardless of the relations they moved forward to stop this threat. In a fate full battle Nick was defeated and the chip that was implanted into his cerebellum was damaged. This allowed Nick to control the AI that tried to command him. All was still amiss when yet another Chimera known as Magna Star arose. This hybrid was a perfect cross, the pilot had no emotions left, nor any sign of a soul; it was the perfect killer.

It wasn't long before Adam and Stephen found out that they were nothing more than mere pawns in a larger game of chess; the government they had fought for was manipulating the Chimera, both the original and the new one. During the final confrontation with the second Chimera, the government released falsified information about the EAP, Europe-Asia Pact stating that they had directly contributed to the creation of the Chimera. And in doing so caused the deaths of thousands, the people of the TA, Trinity Alliance morally out raged demanded war, and thus an armistice that was brought about in order to stop a seemingly common enemy was ended. Currently the war is at a stalemate, neither side has managed to strike up an advantage. However the TA has come up with a theory on how to infiltrate the South Western territory. The territory has been out of the TA and EAP's reach due to a massive energy barrier. The wheels of destiny are turning once again.

Chapter One: First Contact

The wind was blowing harshly through the Martian surface as the tanks of the Euro-Asia Pact, EAP treaded through. The past year was anything less than memorable; the war escalated to Earth, unlike two years ago when the war was held in the shadows from the public this war is very media friendly. However, deceptions still find their way into the war. Most believe the war is about revenge for the weapon that was supposedly unleashed by the EAP in New York City. But that is far from truth, the politicians are fully aware of the importance of the South Western territory on Mars and of the powerful energy substance that is said to dwell with in. Once again, this is a war based on human greed. The EAP was in full swing, almost every MF unit was sent directly to the South Western front to engage the TA in battle. The battle wasn't going well for the EAP, with each passing minute their MFs were swatted down. The higher ups in the EAP decided it was time to send in their prize possession, the Omega unit. It was a team consisting of five of the most skilled pilots the EAP had to offer. Unfortunately, it had been whittled down to one after the previous encounter with the TA. The remaining member of the Omega unit was the most powerful of them all, and yet he was nothing more than a young boy, 16 years old.

The boy sat restrained in his cockpit, his dirty blonde hair flapping in the wind as he slept. He always liked to have his cockpit open during transportation.

"Omega Diabolus we have arrived." The operator said forcing the young pilot to awaken from his slumber. He half opened his right eye revealing a clear blue iris, as deep as the sea on Earth.

"How many times do I have to... *yawn* tell you, call me Zach." The young pilot replied.

"Oh...sorry, yes, of course sir."

"ZACH!"

"Yes...sorry, Zach."

"That's better. So what do we have here today? Just another unit of TA garbage?" Zach question. It could be said that he was arrogant, but he thought himself to be overly aware of his own skill.

"I'm not sure. But reports say that it's a single TA unit."

"A single unit?! How the hell can one unit easily disable all of the Prometheus BXTs?" Zach screamed outraged at the insinuation that the BXTs were so weak that they could be toppled by a single team of pilots.

"BXT's?"

"You know, Bipedal Exoskeleton Tanks. Wow, you really are just a driver huh?"

"That's all I'm paid for..." The driver's foot slammed on the break causing Zack to almost fall out of his cockpit.

"HEY!"

"Sorry, but we're here and I don't want to get caught up in the middle of that."

Zach glanced out from his cockpit to see small blinding explosions lighting up the sky. He smirked.

"Heh, this shouldn't take long. There looks to be at least two BXT's left. I'll be back in fifteen minutes." Zach quickly closed the cockpit of his MF, Hades and turned on the generator. His MF held onto extremely powerful equipment, in one hand was a dual plasma rifle, able to fire two beams of concentrated energy. On the left arm was a metallic blade attached to the armor. The blade was also able to fire discs of energy outwards that could hit a target 1000 meters away. But Zach's prime weapon, a weapon that was able to take them hundreds of TA MFs was his scythe. It was solid, no energy whatsoever, light gleamed off the edge of the finely polished blade. His MF was painted solid orange with stripes of black and purple highlighting the main paintjob. He was extremely fond of his machine, he was confident of his skills. Without giving the driver time to dislodge the MF Zach boosted into the sky. The force of the launch caused the transport to topple.

Two massive BXTs roamed the ground just in front of the energy barrier keeping everyone out of the South Western territory. As their name suggested they were massive tanks fully wrapped in layers upon layers of armor. There were no arm units, just massive cylindrical grenade launchers as well as a

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dual grenade launcher resting on the back of the core. These massive tanks were about the size of three MFs and held onto the fire power of about ten of them. And yet they were falling faster than showed up.

“NOVUS!”

The pilot smirked as he glanced to his side watching the ivory MF he left behind turn to nothing more than a dot amongst the sand. He forgot about his speed at times and would from time to time end up showboating. The BXT tried to follow the movements of the extremely agile blue MF but found itself losing its balance while trying. Suddenly both grenade launchers on the back of the core exploded into thousands of pieces. Out from the smoke soared a crimson MF with two jet-like wings extended outwards on the side from between the shoulders. Then the flat jet wings detached from the top of the core and flew through the sky. The crimson MF soon flew over the wing attachment and began to descend. Just as it came in contact with the smooth surface of the wing two iron restraints wrapped around the mechanical feet. The crimson MF took off once again heading straight for the BXT firing its energy rifles. The beams of energy bounced off the armor plating of the BXT.

“MOVE!” A feminine voice echoed from the distance forcing the crimson MF to strafe to the left allowing an extremely powerful beam of energy through. The energy tore through the right cylindrical grenade launcher. The following explosion caused the BXT to become unbalanced. At that instant the ivory MF began to fly around the leg units of the beast while wrapping its whips around the joint where the ankles would be. With each lap around the legs the whips tightened causing the BXT to have limited amount of movement.

“You’re turn hot shot!”

Suddenly a blur of cerulean light surged past the remaining grenade barrel, a delayed reaction occurred as the barrel exploded leaving the BXT without any offensive capabilities.

Zach gazed from his cockpit in awe over the team work that was being displayed before his very eyes. He began to wonder if he would be able to defeat the unit, but the he began to laugh.

“Heh, I shouldn’t doubt myself, no one has even come close to touching Hades. Once I get rid of them I’m sure I’ll get that promotion! Let’s go!” Zach screamed. Zach wasted little time making his presence known he began to fire his dual plasma rifle immediately. It didn’t take him long to pin point the sniper, he knew that it could cause problems later on and that it was best to deal with it now. The beams of energy tore through the elongated cannon resting on the back of the blue and pink MF causing it the MF to collapse to the ground. The pilot screamed, cursing under her breath.

“Damn it. Hey guys we got another one!”

The three MFs all turned around to see Hades.

“So you guys are the ones taking out all the BXTs! Care to try your luck with me?” Zach screamed.

The three MFs stood there hovering.

“Adam who took out the last lead unit?” Mario asked glancing over to Blue Dragon. Adam shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t know, I think Stephen did.” Both Mario and Adam glanced over to Stephen.

“Nope, I could have sworn that was you Mario.”

“Really? Who was it? I’ve lost track.”

“Umm I think it was Fafner.” Adam interrupted.

“Are you sure? I could have sworn it was Gail...” Mario replied.

“No you’re both wrong, it was Phantom.” Stephen replied.

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Both Adam and Mario let out a big “oh”.

“Yeah you’re right, I did take him out. And Stephen took out Fafner before that. So that means it’s your turn Adam.” Mario replied.

“Nice... been a while since I had a good work out.” Adam replied. Blue Dragon slowly boosted in front of both Alpha and Anima.

“You can handle him right?” Stephen asked sarcastically.

“Yeah, you guys just worry about the remaining BXT.” Adam replied.

“Got it. Don’t have too much fun.” Mario remarked.

Zach just sat there wide eyed, never before in his career had he ever see three pilots choose over who got to fight the head MF.

“Are you sure you don’t want their help. You might need it. I am the Whisper of Death you know.” Zach replied. He had always used that as a way of intimidating his foes, usually they all had heard of the Whisper of Death and trembled at the very mention of his name.

“Whisper of Death huh...sorry, never heard of you.” Adam replied grinning. His hands were already firmly placed on the throttles.

“WHAT?!” Zach was insulted. In his opinion everyone should have heard of him.

“You’re bluffing.” Zach replied. “Is it possible that I get the name of the fool who thought he could best me?”

“If it means that much to you, I’m the Azure Knight.” Adam replied.

Zach suddenly found himself quiet in his cockpit. He had heard stories of the Azure Knight, how it bested Fenrir two years ago and then destroyed the Chimera unit that wiped out a countless number of EAP soldiers.

“So you’re him then. I’ve been waiting for this moment my entire life inside the cockpit!” Zach screamed.

Hades burst out speeding towards Blue Dragon while firing the dual plasma rifle. Adam sighed and easily avoided the attack. The wings on Blue Dragon retracted as the blue MF zoomed past Hades slashing with the two energy sabers at the last critical second and continued to head into the distance. Zach appeared to be confused and insulted.

“What the? He didn’t even consider me to be a threat! That ASSHOLE!” Zach screamed as he stepped on the accelerator. Just as Hades began to move the arms and the legs of the core fell off. There was no mess, no needless exposure of wires or jagged edges. It was a clean slice.

“Damn...” Zach mumbled under his breath.

Chapter Two: Back to Earth

“How much longer is this pointless war going to last anyway?” A young voice brought up.

The transport heading back to Earth was filled of TA soldiers all heading home to take the two week vacations they were allowed before returning back to the front line. The war had turned into an arms

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race, mainly as to which group could break into the South Western territory first. By now all the resources that had been discovered were all in deployment to Earth. The main focus now was what was beyond the energy barrier. Every soldier knew this much, but at the same time they didn't want to partake in the battles. The rumors surrounding the energy barrier sent shivers down most peoples spines. Whenever people get close to entering they all just vanish from existence.

"This pointless war will last as long as the politicians want it to. Take it from me, nothing is as it seems. But all we can do is just sit here and follow orders..." Adam mumbled underneath his breath. His head leaned against the wall of the transport, his hair covering his eyes. The younger soldiers turned their attention to him. They had a feeling of who he was but weren't sure.

"Are you..."

Adam's left eye slowly opened while he smirked.

"I'm Adam Novus...no one special." He replied.

"Nothing special?! You only single handedly took out the EAP's Chimera!" The younger soldiers had a tendency to lose their professionalism when they became excited. They no longer looked like soldiers, only a bunch of children prancing around like it was Christmas morning.

"I guess...I did what I had to, no more no less."

"Yeah, but to accomplish such an amazing feat at 16! I'm only 16 I and I'm no where near your skill level."

"Aww you better stop that before his head gets any bigger and explodes." Adam smirked as he saw Heather walk to the back of the transport where they all were. She smiled; her eyes were shut as she was laughing at her own wit. Her hair was much shorter than it used to be, she used to have her hair reaching just beyond her shoulder blades, now it was just shoulder length.

"Huh? But he's..." Adam cut off the younger soldier that jumped into defense mode.

"It's fine. We go way back. This is Heather Pertencia, and you are..." Adam didn't even realize he didn't know the young boy's name.

"I'm Reine...Reine Proprius I just transferred here from the 32ND MF platoon." The younger pilot mumbled.

Adam's eye brow arched in curiosity.

"Really? Which unit have you been assigned to?"

"It says the 3rd Armored Division, 1st battalion."

"I see...well you're in luck that's us." Adam replied.

Reine's eyes grew bigger in size, at first he felt a bit uneasy about transferring to a new squad, but once he found out who was there his anxieties were gone.

"I'm gonna...you mean, I'm in your unit?!"

Both Adam and Heather nodded.

"Yep, looks like. We'll go over the details later. Right now we have some time off so we shouldn't spend it talking about work." Adam replied.

Reine nodded. "So umm...where are you heading once we touch down in Macarthur Spaceport?"

"Well, I'm heading back to the city to meet up with some friends. Then who knows, probably just enjoy being home. I haven't been home in months." Adam replied.

"Cool...I have to wait for a plane to head back down to Florida so I can meet with my family." Reine replied.

"Heh, enjoy your time with them...you never know what could happen. Anyway, it was good talking with you Reine. We'll get better acquainted when we get back." Adam mentioned.

"Awesome!" Reine exclaimed. Adam and Heather left the back side of the transport heading towards the officer's deck. As the door slid open Stephen nodded.

"So, what's the situation then?" Adam asked.

"Eh, nothing from what I can see. The EAP's movements on Earth have been masked greatly. We know they're searching for something off the coast of the Atlantic but we're not sure what." Mario

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interrupted. Adam glanced to the side, Mario was standing in the corner of the room leaning against the wall with his arms crossed across his chest.

“The Atlantic? What could they be looking for there?”

“That’s a good question. You should know better than any of us though.” Stephen replied as he threw a folder towards his younger brother. They were fortunate enough of being the only ones in the officer’s room at this time. Adam looked awkwardly at his brother and then when Stephen nodded he began to open the manila folder. He was shocked to find still images of his own battle with the second Chimera over the ocean. It was only about a year and a half ago but he still forgot that the majority of the fight occurred over the ocean.

“Heh, you don’t think they’re...” Before Adam could finish his sentence Stephen moved away from the 3 dimensional image of the ocean on the outskirts of Manhattan.

“That they’re searching for the remains of the C-2? Yeah, that’s the only thing I could come up with.”

“But why the hell would they want to find that thing? I mean it can’t be of any use to them in the condition that it is in.” Adam replied.

“Heh, they probably want to see if they can connect it back to the TA and clear their names.” Mario replied jokingly. But something struck everyone in the room, Adam, Stephen and Heather all turned back to Mario. Their faces were serious, and concerned.

“What? I was just joking.”

“No...actually I think you may be onto something. If the EAP succeeds in proving the TA’s accusations false then the countries might turn against their government, civil wars could break out. And if that happens...” Adam cut off his brother.

“If that happens then the EAP will have more than enough time to figure out a way through the barrier while the TA deals with the outbreaks of Civil War...damn, and I was hoping to actually enjoy my stay home.” Adam replied.

“Don’t worry, we’ll take 5 days off and then meet up at my house to discuss how we’re going to handle this.” Stephen replied.

“Umm...I hate to break it to you, but we don’t have our MFs. They’re still on Mars.” Mario interrupted.

Stephen glared back at his friend.

“It doesn’t matter. We won’t need our MFs for this. I don’t intend on fighting. Just trust me on this.” Stephen replied.

“Fine.”

“So Adam...” Heather began to talk, Adam glanced over his shoulder.

“Yeah?”

“Have you talked to Sharon lately?”

Adam was bewildered by the comment. It wasn’t often that Heather would ask him about Sharon, as a matter of fact this was the first time.

“Yeah, yesterday. She’s picking me up from the spaceport.” Adam replied.

“I see. Is she going to come out with us tomorrow night?” Heather asked.

It then struck Adam, he had been busy with so many things that he forgot tomorrow was his 18th birthday.

“Oh...I’m not sure..hehehe.”

“You forgot to invite her?!” Heather’s voice raised a few levels. Adam’s head nearly shrunk between his shoulders and into his collar. His face turned bright red; his eyes began to wander around the room refusing to make contact with Heather.

“I forgot it was my birthday to be honest...”

“Idiot...well luckily I invited her. You really are predictable.” Heather replied.

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Attention all passengers please take your seats and strap yourselves in. We are currently entering Earth's atmosphere and will be experiencing turbulence. ETA to MacArthur Spaceport, Long Island New York, 1 hour and 35 minutes...

The landing on the MacArthur Spaceport went smoothly while thousands of people waited inside the lobby all watching the shuttle touchdown. The lobby of the spaceport was packed full of people along with concession stands and gift shops. Obsidian tiles lined the floor while massive 20 foot pane glass windows gave the friends and family a view of the shuttles. At Gate A everyone awaited the arrival of the soldiers that came back from Mars. Many people found themselves holding up plastic signs with their friend's names written in bold letters. One young girl stood at the front of the crowd holding a sign herself, she had long brown hair with highlights of light brown streaking down. Her hair was held up in a pony tail allowing her shoulders to breath. She looked eloquent in the light pink to purple gradient halter top and denim jeans. Her brown eyes widened as she recognized her friend, her arms quickly shot into the air and began to wave from side to side. Adam smirked as he saw Sharon as he approached he began to read the sign and began to laugh. It read: **BETTER HAVE BROUGHT GIFTS OR AT LEAST CHOCOLATES** in bold letters.

"You're funny." Adam mumbled as he approached Sharon. Sharon quickly dropped the sign and ran over to Adam. The two embraced one another, Sharon nearly caused Adam to fall as she jumped into his arms. They hadn't seen each other for six months, even though they talked on the phone 3 times a week it didn't matter. It seemed like forever. They began to kiss in reps, they would kiss a few pecks on the lips and then end it with one passionate embrace. Stephen and the others just watched from behind trying to hold in their "awes". But it was very rare that Mario would be quiet.

"Yea KID! HOOK A BROTHER UP!" He screamed from behind. Adam chuckled on the inside but that was about it. Heather ended up hitting Mario across the back of the head. When Adam and Sharon finally managed to stop showing their affection they met up with Stephen and the others.

"Hey Sharon, how have you been?" Heather asked as the two hugged.

"I've been pretty good. Been kind of boring, but I just recently got a job looking after children at a day care. It works for now. You?"

Heather smirked.

"Aside from getting tired of seeing their ugly faces every day I've been doing pretty well."

"Sharon.." Stephen nodded.

"Hey Stephen. Making sure Adam isn't doing anything stupid?"

"Well he hasn't broken any bones if that's what you mean. Aside from that I can't really hold him back from doing anything anymore."

Sharon laughed. She turned to Mario and the two hugged.

"Good to see you again Sharon."

"Thanks, you too. You find a wife yet?" Sharon replied sarcastically.

"Sadly no...unless you have a sister." Mario replied jokingly.

"No, sorry I'm an only child." She replied.

Adam appeared behind Sharon with his right arm hanging over her shoulder.

"Now if you'll excuse us, we have some catching up to do. Give me a call tomorrow so we can meet up." Adam said.

Stephen nodded.

"Take care." Adam said as him and Sharon walked out in the opposite direction.

"Adam..."

"Yeah what is it?"

"My dad...he has something he wants to show you."

"Oh, can it wait?"

"No...he said it's urgent."

"I see...any idea what it is?"

“No...I’ve been trying to get him to tell me but he hasn’t said a thing. He said he doesn’t even know what it is. But said you would.”

“I see...well then, we should get going then. I really hope this is an uneventful break....”

Chapter Three: Reality Check

“You really don’t have any idea what your father wants to show me then?”

Sharon shook her head as they walked across the charcoal street. Adam held tightly onto the umbrella so that they could keep dry. New York seemed to like rain, the frigid droplets of liquid pounded onto the city that never sleeps. The Genesis building wasn’t too far from their current location only a few blocks away, 15 minutes on foot. Adam sighed, his jacket flapped in the wind. The last time he saw the Professor was right before he took off to Mars, just after Blue Dragon was repaired. It had been approximately 8 and ½ months since they last met. Questions continued to run through his mind

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expeditiously, dozens of thoughts and concerns plagued the very essence of his own existence. Since getting away from New York, Genesis specifically Adam's life wasn't too complex or painful. Sharon continued to stare at Adam as they treaded through the city; his head remained angled downwards at the cement.

"You ok?"

Adam turned looking at Sharon, but his eyes seemed to be focusing elsewhere. They were walking through Times Square at the moment, it had been reborn to its former glory but still the memories haunted him. Translucent MFs blazed past the buildings dueling fiercely, his memories trickled out of his brain and into a reality distorted by his nightmares. Every step was like a punch in his gut, as the images of Blue Dragon and Chimera slowly evaporated into nothing they were replaced by flashes of his friends, friends that he felt he failed; Amy, and then Sean, along with Christina, Jen and Mike. His fist curled up into a ball like a damn holding back his frustration from abruptly pouring out. He was able to get sleep the night before, the original plan was to meet up with Sharon's dad and get it out of the way but he had to cancel due to some unknown emergency. Adam's eyes laid open for the better part of the night and even the morning, his body twisting and turning with each passing second. He was trying not to think about the rough night he had, after all it was the first night in over half a year that he got to sleep in his own bed, a bed surrounded by hanging pictures, frozen frames of the timeline of his life so far. Each one bringing a duality of memories, joy for the time had, and pain for the friends lost. It was his birthday although it didn't feel like it; he turned 18.

"So, are the plans for tonight still definite? I mean due to the rain and all?" Sharon asked smiley as she tightly wrapped her arm around Adam's. She always managed to find a way to smile, or at least to break the monotony of silence.

"Not sure, I'll have to call Heather after we get done with the meeting."

"I see, well we should go out no matter what! It's your birthday! So cheer up!"

"Heh...thanks Sharon."

It wasn't long before they stood in front of the Genesis building. Adam smiled; this was where he and Sharon first met about 2 years ago. It had been a while since he stepped foot into it, after finding out about the experiments and the projects of the Chimera line that they developed his mouth was left with a bitter taste whenever they were mentioned. But it was hard to deny the fact that without Genesis he would never have become an MF pilot. As they entered the lobby Adam began to look around, everything appeared to be the same, the beautiful fountain that was out for display. Despite the resplendent scene that the building constantly gave off, he still wasn't too thrilled to be standing in the lobby. Sharon placed her hand gently onto his shoulder and began to rub softly around his shoulder blade.

"I forgot, you haven't been in here for almost 1 year and a half."

Adam smiled back at Sharon liked it didn't bother him, but she knew it did. She knew him well, possibly better than he knew himself. It didn't take long until Professor Amare showed up outside the elevator to the right of the fountain. He looked incredibly pale, his eyes were borderline translucent, and his hair was nearly all gone. The wrinkles in his skin were longer and thicker than they had ever been. Adam wasn't sure if he liked the feeling that he was getting from the Professor.

"Professor? Are you alright?"

The Professor waved his hand while trying to crack a smile. His dry insensate lips managed to break apart revealing cracked teeth and infected gums, Adam knew it then that something was wrong.

"Please, just call me Mathew." The Professor replied.

"..." Adam didn't say a word, he wasn't sure if there was anything appropriate that he could say. He simply nodded and followed the Professor into the elevator. As they entered the cylindrical device Adam found himself look at Sharon. She suddenly became quiet, her eyes half opened and her face angled slightly away from the Professor and towards the ground. As each floor moved passed them she began to scratch her right arm, it was barely noticeable at first but it eventually began to become a more constant process. Every few seconds she would start scratching her right arm; each time more furiously

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than the last, finally Adam grabbed hold of her right arm which was covered in the ivory cloth of her shirt.

“Be careful you’re going to tear through the clothes if you keep that up.” Adam mentioned.

Sharon sighed placing her left hand deep into her pocket. Adam’s eyes slowly glanced up catching the Professor’s own eyes nearly engulfed in liquid but he quickly looked the other way.

“(Just what’s going on...)” Adam began to think to himself.

The elevator jerked as they reached the basement floor. Adam sighed while the doors slid open revealing a dull flickering light.

“We’re here. Come on...” The Professor’s voice became sullen as his feet left the elevator.

Sharon smiled grabbing hold of Adam’s arm. The two walked out of the elevator but Adam had to stop. His eyes frantically looked around the darkened room and widened. The room was filled with hundreds of elongated tubes. Inside the tubes were what appeared to be lifeless human bodies floating in an eerie green substance. His body hit the floor in terror; Sharon also seemed to be freaked out by what was revealed. Both she and Adam remained on the ground with their arms keeping them from completely laying on the ground.

“WHAT THE HELL IS THIS!?” Adam screamed aloud. Sharon was too frightened to even force out any sounds. The Professor just glanced at both of them and sighed.

“Come on, what we are here for isn’t in this room.” He ignored every tube and continued to walk towards an office in the back.

“Are you alright to go any further?” Adam asked as he helped Sharon stand back up. As he touched her arm he flinched at how cold her skin was, her body was also trembling excessively.

“Yea...I’m ok...I’m ok...” She mumbled.

The two of them slowly began to head for the office. Sharon’s face clung to Adam’s shoulder; her eyes were shut tightly refusing to look at any one of the horrors that filled the room. Adam however had managed to get over the initial shock and continued to look around at the bodies that were floating in the tubes. His eyes widened as he stopped in front of one tube labeled “C-Revision.” He placed his hands on the outer layer of glass. Whipping away the frost ridden dew away, once again he nearly fell to the ground. The abrupt movement of his shoulder from the second shock pushed Sharon away. Although she refused to open her eyes she remained away from Adam. He began to look frantically for some sort of control panel, or notice on what it was that he was looking at. Even though he knew what he was looking at the minute his eyes made contact with the tube. The Professor realizing neither of the two teens were behind him walked out of the office. As soon as he saw Adam his head began to shake.

“I’m sorry Adam...”

Adam’s head jolted back to the Professor. His right hand shaking uncontrollably.

“What the hell is this?! TELL ME WHAT THE HELL THIS IS!” Adam screamed.

“*Sigh*...are you sure the word what is appropriate in this situation?”

Adam’s right fist pounded onto the metallic power source for the tube. A loud clang rang out echoing off the walls that were hidden beneath the shadows.

“Damn it Mathew...This isn’t possible!”

“I’m afraid with Genesis’ technology and resources it is possible Adam...”

“But this isn’t right! THIS ISN’T RIGHT!” Adam screamed.

“No...it isn’t.”

“Why are they doing this? WHY COULDN’T THEY LET HIM REST?!” Adam continued to scream.

“It’s not him Adam...he died.” The Professor replied.

Adam turned away from the Professor and away from Sharon. He just stared at the strikingly familiar face that was sealed away in the tube. The young man’s long black and crimson hair floated softly in the liquid, his face remaining in a sleep like state.

“Nick...” Adam mumbled.

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“It’s not Nick...it’s nothing more than his clone. Created from his unique DNA found on that battle site nearly 2 years ago.” The Professor mentioned. Adam turned around running up to the Professor in a fit of rage.

“Why? Why make a clone of him? What’s the point? The Chimera project was destroyed...”

“It was...but Luscious got back the Chimera...he recovered it from the facility.” The Professor replied.

“He’s going to create another Chimera then?”

“No...there’s no point now. Both of the main factions of this world are already at one another’s throats. The Chimera has already served its purpose.

“What? That doesn’t make any sense, I destroyed it.”

“The true purpose of the Chimera Adam was not to defeat the enemies of the TA. Luscious is twisted; he is infatuated with his own ideals and aspirations. The Chimera forced the war between the EAP and the TA to become public knowledge to every living person on Earth. It also forced the TA to blame the EAP for the Chimera’s existence, they were too afraid of what would have happened if the people living in Alliance countries were to find out that it was them who created the monstrosity and in sequence were responsible for the deaths of their own people. He wants the Chimera now for his own body guard, a defender of his own Utopia. His left hand if you will.”

Adam sat there confused even more than usual.

“He thinks he’s a God?”

“He believes that he would be a better God for humanity than the current one. He is also trying to find his right hand to accompany his left.”

“His right hand?”

“The Dragon...you.”

Adam’s eyes widened in shock. The Dragon was built by his parents while the Chimera was built by Genesis. Essentially the two were equal in power, but the very idea of the Chimera was evil and sinned against nature.

“Me?”

“Yes you. He manipulated your parents into building the Dragon...and now he wants it back. He’s going to start coming to you, trying to get you to trust him and possibly even fight along side him.”

“I’m not sure I follow...who exactly is he fight?”

“I’m afraid I myself do not understand what exactly it is he is trying to do, or what he is referring to as Utopia.” The Professor replied.

“Heh...he’s referring to “no where”. “ Adam replied.

The Professor smirked. “ I see, you’re aware of its original meaning.”

“Of course, it shouldn’t be that hard to decipher. I mean is it really possible to live in a place where everything is perfect?”

“No...not as long as humans are bound by original sin.” The Professor replied.

“I see...so since my brother was killed he decided to make a clone of him? Why? Why not just get another pilot?”

“There’s the tricky part, apparently during the time your brother was piloting the Chimera the two of them bounded making it impossible for any other human to pilot it.”

“I see...ok, that explains Nicks’ clone...now what about the other hundred or so tubes?”

The Professor sighed. He ignored Adam’s question only to walk back into the office. Adam glanced to Sharon who shrugged her shoulders and followed him into the office.

“Mathew?” Adam mumbled.

“I’m not sure...I’m not sure why he is having Genesis genetically engineer humans...but apparently the organization has been dabbling into God’s territory from the very beginning. Whether it being gene manipulation or DNA creation, Genesis has been trying to reach for the seemingly impossible to reach apple, they are dead set on eating from the apple Adam...I’m not sure why though.”

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“If you don’t know why then why the hell did you bring me here in the first place? You’re just making me think about more questions!”

“I brought you here so that you could know the truth Adam. As much of it that I am aware of, it’s too late for me to go any further and it’s because of that reason that you need to find out exactly what Genesis is planning.”

“I see.... I’m not sure if I can do it.”

“You have too!” The Professor’s voice burst out, it was the loudest Adam had ever heard it before. Adam knew it meant a lot for the Professor so he agreed.

“One other thing...here.” The Professor mentioned as he tossed an envelope to Adam. As Adam opened it his eyes widened even more. He pulled out a paper with the text “Project C-2, Pilot, Mike Aquilis” written.

“Mike? Is this some kind of joke? This thing says that Mike was the pilot of the second Chimera. But that would be impossible. He was murdered along with my other friends, Sean, Christina and Jen.”

“I’m afraid that’s not entirely true Adam...Sean, Christina and Jen were murdered because of what was said in front of you. Mike survived, he was only ruffed up and then was brought back here to finish training as the C-2. Adam, Genesis killed your friends.” The Professor replied.

Adam couldn’t believe it, he slowly stumbled backwards tripping over a chair that was behind him. His body flung to the ground hard, Sharon then ran towards him in an effort to comfort him Just as she touched the back of his shoulder he jerked up and backed away from her. His vision became blurred and his head was throbbing.

“Get away from me! This is a joke...I know this isn’t real. I mean...come on, clones, deception, a business man with a highly religious moral? It doesn’t make any sense! If Genesis has been creating clones since the dawn of time they that means they’re probably flooding the world with them in order to further their influence...and if that’s the case...then how can I be sure? HOW CAN I BE SURE YOU TWO ARE REAL AND NOT CLONES?!” Adam screamed. He was losing his composure entirely, Sharon motioned to go after him but the Professor just held onto her shoulder.

“Adam...you have to trust me...at the very least trust my daughter...”The Professor said calmly.

“I...this...this isn’t happening...” Adam mumbled. He then collapsed to the ground, his hands dropped the sheets of paper. For the next few seconds Adam just sat there staring at his hands, his eyes then grew wider and his mouth gawked.

“I killed him...I killed my friend then...his blood.....his blood.” Adam said underneath his breath. Tears slowly began to run down Sharon’s cheek, she couldn’t bare to see Adam in this condition. She ran away from her father’s grip and embraced Adam. Adam didn’t even acknowledge her for the first minute; he just rocked back in forth with his spirit broken. Sharon didn’t mind, she just continued to embrace him rubbing his back while telling him that it was going to be alright.

“I’m sorry you had to find all of this out like this Adam...but you need to be aware of Genesis’ true form.” The Professor replied.

Adam snapped out of his trance and glanced at Mathew. As Mathew smiled back at him in the only way an old man could his eyes shot open. Blood spurt out from his chest abruptly; there was no sound, and no scream just an old man flinging through the air defying gravity as the essence of his life poured out. Adam then grabbed Sharon and sprinted towards The Professor. The bullets stopped oddly enough as soon as Adam and Sharon stood up.

“MATHEW!!!” Adam screamed while Sharon blurted out “FATHER!”

“WHAT THE HELL?! WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?!” Adam screamed out. He then turned around staring into the abyss of shadows lingering behind him and Sharon. Sharon remained clutched onto her dying father. Adam’s attention moved to the floor, now empty. The papers in regards to the 2nd Chimera were gone.

“Good...looks like everything is going according to plan...”

“Luscious....isn’t this a bit much? I mean what if he finds out...”

“Severen shut up. Luscious knows exactly what he’s doing. And besides this is perfect, the little brat is now aware of the clones, and the Chimera. Its time to see if we were right about him...”

“Caleb? I don’t see why you have such faith in that boy...Adam?”

“Both of you stop you’re bickering. This is like chess; you need to know how to position your most important pieces before delivering the final requiem.” Luscious mumbled turning to a man that was tied heavily down to a chair. “Isn’t that right Mathew?....”

Chapter Four: Age of Shadows

“Are you ok?” Stephen’s voice rang out but Adam just stood outside drenched. The rain failed to let up any bit. Stephen, Mario, Heather, all stood underneath the awning outside of the newest club in Manhattan, Age of Shadows. Adam along with Sharon firmly clutching onto his arm just stood in the down pour a few feet away.

“I’m...I’m not sure...” Adam mumbled underneath his breath. Sharon remained quiet, refusing to say a thing. She was still in shock over what she had witnessed.

“Maybe it would be a better idea to talk about this inside...come on.” Heather interrupted. Adam and Sharon followed everyone to the inside, their mental demeanor already shook up.

The inside of the club was a mix of bright florescent lights with dark shadows. The bar was packed with people all already well beyond the legal limit of alcohol. The bar was a finely polished oak that stretched along the right side near the entrance. Three flat panel screens attached the wall near the crack where the ceiling met the wall; just under the screens was an elongated rack filled with all sorts of liquor, behind the bottles was a green florescent tube that gave the impressions of the bottles glowing. The dance floor was wide, about 20 feet wide, and yet there was still very little room in the massive pack of raging hormones. Along the outer edge of the dance floor were a row of booths and tables where even

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more young men and women were seen guzzling more alcohol whether it is beer or liquor it didn't make any difference. The age for entrance was 17, an odd number for a club that serves alcohol but it didn't make a difference. Each person who was under 21 was marked in order to represent their age. Mario was the only one who was of age, he found himself unable to control his eyes as they instantly began to look around the inside of the club. Every girl in the club was dressed provocatively revealing as much skin as they possibly could without being naked. Only Heather and Sharon were dressed more conservatively, Heather continued to emanate a certain amount of radiance; her hair was worn up with only a few strands of hair flowing down over her face. She was wearing a blue and purple shirt that hung over her right shoulder leaving her left revealed. Along with the shirt she was wearing an obsidian skirt that rang tightly off her thighs. She turned to everyone and just motioned that she was going to find a booth for them to sit. Stephen glanced back at his brother whose head was still staring at the floor.

"Are you going to tell us what happened?"

"...he's dead Stephen.." Adam mumbled.

Stephen's eyes widened, he wasn't exactly sure who Adam was talking about.

"My father....he was shot earlier tonight..." Sharon spoke, it was the first time she had spoken since the event.

"What?!" Stephen tried to keep things quiet; they were in a public setting. Adam walked over to his brother and began to whisper.

"I've seen Genesis' true facility Stephen...there were thousands of them...tubes containing people...more specifically clones of people." Adam's voice crackled under the emotional strain. Stephen just stood there; he couldn't find a simple way to respond to that type of news. His lips parted as he was going to respond but they only shut seconds later, his mind was blank. There were too many questions rambling through his head.

"Stephen...I'm not sure what they are doing, or why they are doing this, but Genesis is playing God more or less. I already had questions before I found this out, and I was willing to work my way to the top of the military with you in order to find some answers, but I'm not sure if we'll find answers looking in the military. I think we're digging in the wrong place...."

"Hmpf, that maybe so, but if what you're saying is true then it would be too risky to investigate Genesis out in the open. I'm still not completely sure what to make of this, and Sharon...no words could ever express the sorrow that I am feeling for you...we have all lost so many people close to our hearts within a short period of time. Adam for both your sakes I suggest that we continue with this plan. Genesis and the military have a close relationship; I'm sure in time we'll find the answers."

"I'm not sure I can wait that long Stephen..."

"I see, so what do you have planned? Run into Genesis demand a meeting with the Presidents and just throw these accusations at them?"

"..."

"It would be better for you to stick to the plan. We already know of the connection between the Military and Genesis with the development of Chimera, I'm sure this won't be too far away. I don't mean to sound bitter, but right now you need to bury this and move on. Tonight is quite possibly the only free night you're going to have in a long time. On top of that it's your birthday...I know it's hard but try and enjoy this, and tomorrow we'll work." Stephen replied.

Adam just glared back at his brother; he knew he was trying his best. But this wasn't something that could just be pushed aside, even if it was only for a few hours. His eyes shut tightly in order to hold back the tears that were trying to break out, soon he felt Sharon rubbing his back gently.

"It's alright. You should enjoy tonight...don't worry about what happened." She mentioned.

Adam just stared at her, she had just lost her father and she was more willing to move on than he was. It then hit him; she was probably trying to avoid the pain. After all he would be leaving in a week and a half and she would have to carry the pain by herself, she had no living relative that he was aware of, no brothers, maybe an aunt or an uncle but surely not in New York. Adam embraced Sharon close to his body and smiled.

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“Alright, we’ll have fun.” Adam replied.

“Good...(if Genesis is already dabbling with human DNA then who knows how much time is left before they reveal their true intentions for the world.)” Stephen began to think to himself.

Both Heather and Mario were already sitting down in their booth which was right near the entrance to the dance floor. Beams of lights were flashing vibrantly making it difficult to see clearly but Adam took notice of his friends.

“Well now that it’s settled, happy birthday Adam.” Stephen said as he extended his hand. Adam chuckled forcefully and took his brother’s hand.

“Thanks...”

The first hour was somewhat awkward, Adam tried to enjoy himself but found that it was a lot harder than he had originally planned. Distorted images of his brother’s clone floating lifelessly in a tube continued to haunt him along with images of an energy beam completely disintegrating his friend Mike’s body, a beam that came from his own MF. Adam reclined backwards against the leather cushion attached to the back of the booth. It was only him, Stephen and Sharon at the moment, Heather and Mario both took to the dance floor about 15 minutes prior to the current time. Even though they were clearly marked since it was his birthday the bartenders seemed to ignore the age limit and served them alcohol regardless. Stephen smirked as he glanced out into the sea of people; there was Mario stuck in between two other women grinding up on his body. His arms wailing out as he danced in sync with the rhythm of the music. Adam gave a half smile while his right arm hung around the back of Sharon’s shoulder.

“ADAM NOVUS?!” A voice screamed out from behind the booth causing Adam along with Sharon and Stephen to glance. The voice belonged to a gorgeous woman standing about 5’4 with long dark blonde hair and green eyes. Her skin was a healthy mix of peach and tan, she was wearing an ivory halter top with a beige skirt while holding onto what appeared to be a mixed drink in her hand. It took Adam a minute to recognize the girl, she took offense.

“Ashley?” Adam mumbled softly, he didn’t want to yell the name and then be wrong.

The girl nodded smiling and began to walk over.

“Adam Novus wow, it’s been forever.” Ashley said. Adam nodded while Sharon just remained attached to him. Adam slowly moved out of the booth forcing Sharon to move as well.

“Ashley Bellulus...it’s nearly been forever, about 10 years hasn’t it?” Adam asked.

Ashley nodded; it indeed had been 10 years since they last saw one another. Both attended the same grammar school and then after that Adam became home schooled from Genesis. They both hugged one another each surprised at how the other turned out. Sharon sneered under her breath and once again wrapped her arms around Adam. Adam glanced at Sharon and began to laugh.

“Hehe...I’m sorry. Ashley this is my girlfriend Sharon Amare.”

“Wow, how’d you get her? She’s beautiful. What’s he paying you?” Ashley asked jokingly.

“Ha..ha...ha, you’re funny. Anyway, this is my brother Stephen.” Adam mentioned. Ashley glanced over to Stephen and nodded.

“Hi, I’m Ashley, your brother and I used to go to grammar school together, but that was a long time ago.” She mentioned.

“So how have you been? I mean, the last time I saw you I was about 8 and you were like 7. I’m sure a lot has happened since then.”

“Yeah you have no idea...I almost died about 2 years ago.” She mentioned.

Adam’s eyes grew pale; death wasn’t one of his favorite topics.

“You almost died?! What happened?!” Adam’s voice grew in intensity, he had seen too many of his friends die, and hearing that another one was close didn’t help ease his own soul.

“Well...” Ashley began, “you remember that battle in Times Square?”

A sharp pain crashed through Adam’s spine, the mention of Times Square continued to bring back an array of memories that he never wanted to think of again.

“Yeah...all too well.” He mumbled.

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“Huh?”

“You see, me and Adam are both MF pilots for the military....we were fighting that day.”

Stephen interrupted.

Ashley’s mouth nearly crashed into the floor, she had never thought in her wildest dreams that the little boy she knew would end up in the cockpit of an MF. Her body then switched positions slightly angling towards the dance floor with her right arm arched onto her hip.

“I see...so which one were you piloting?”

“...the blue one...with the wings...” Adam mumbled.

“Really? Well isn’t that interesting....I owe you my life.” Ashley mentioned with a smile.

Adam’s head shot upwards, that wasn’t the response he was expecting.

“What are you talking about?”

“Heh, well I guess you wouldn’t remember since it wasn’t anything big to you. But I was standing outside trying to get my younger sister to leave when all of that metal and whatever you’d call it nearly crashed onto us. But you showed up at the last second destroying all of it. I couldn’t believe what had happened; I was on the ground in a daze mesmerized. I tried to get information from the military about the machine and its pilot but I got nothing. Wow, who would have expected this hahaha.” She continued on. Her face was bright red and her eyes curved close as she continued to laugh. Adam and Stephen just stared at her confused, they both shrugged their shoulders.

“Well it was good to see you again Ashley.” Adam replied.

“You too....OOH, I love this song.” She began shaking her hips in accordance to the rhythm of the music. Adam raised his hands shaking, he refused to dance. Ashley then glanced at Stephen and with a devilish grin grabbed onto his arm. Stephen struggled for a bit while Ashley continued to tug onto his arm. Mario smiled from behind and managed to move towards Stephen. Stephen’s eyes caught a glimpse of Mario, he knew what was coming. With a quick shove from Mario Stephen ended up on the dance floor with Ashley. Adam began to laugh; it was the first time in the entire day that he had shown any sign of positive emotions.

“So you refuse to dance?” Sharon asked. Adam glance back at her still laughing.

“It’s not that I refuse to dance, it’s just that I don’t dance that often.”

“I see...well then, now’s a good time to start.”

“Huh? Wha?...Wait a minute!” It was too late Sharon began to dance around Adam while pulling him towards the dance floor. In the beginning Sharon just danced slowly around his body but as the music pounded forward her hips began to swing more vibrantly and provocatively. Adam really had no choice at this point, as Sharon’s body moved up and down his torso his inhibitions were tossed to the wind. His hands firmly placed on the curves of her hips and they continued to dance to and fro as the music continued to blare.

Seconds turned into minutes, it all happened quickly, they all stayed on the dance floor for a good portion of the night. When they all finally had enough they nearly passed out into the booth. Sweat dripping down their faces as they breathed heavily. Something in the air just enticed them to continue after every song. They only stopped as the DJ cut the music. The dance floor had been empty for a few minutes as every person ran to the bar or sat down and order another drink.

“That was...interesting..” Stephen mumbled. Ashley soon punched Stephen’s elbow abruptly.

“Oh you know you enjoyed it.” Ashley replied in between long pants of breathing.

“I don’t know you...I’m Heather.” Heather mentioned as she had just noticed the new girl who was sitting with them.

“Oh...I’m sorry, I’m Ashley. I used to know Adam when we were kids.” She replied.

“I’m Mario.” Mario interrupted.

They all became quiet as a screen lit up just on the other side of the dance floor. It was massive taking up the entire wall; in the screen was a single line of text, “Azure Cup Tournament.”

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“Hey guys, what’s the Azure Cup?” Adam questioned. Stephen then glanced to the screen confused as well. Suddenly a familiar voice echoed out of the speakers.

“The Azure Cup, a tournament being held in order to decide just who is the strongest MF pilot on Earth and Mars...I’m Luscious Malum, and along side me are the prodigies of Genesis, Severen and Caleb Prodito.”

Adam’s eyes flared, there stood Caleb his one time team member. He quickly looked back at Stephen and then glanced at Heather.

“Is that Caleb? The pilot of Gemini Caleb?” Adam asked.

“I believe it is...and from the looks of it he’s the other twin of Genesis...” Stephen mumbled.

“But what the hell...” Sharon’s finger touched the outer brim of Adam’s lips forcing him to be quiet as the announcement continued on.

“Genesis is proud to hold the first ever MF tournament in hopes to direct everyone’s attention from this pointless war. Every MF pilot is allowed to register, all MF pilots in either military faction whether it be the EAP or the TA is already registered for entry and just has to reply to an RSVP notice received in the mail. Now for all you youngsters out there who are interested in MFs and perform well daily in VR training don’t fret; you can register as well. In fact if you register Genesis will manufacture your very own customized MF for use in the tournament. Now I bet you all are wondering where this tournament will be held, well let me answer this for you now. For years Genesis’ space program has been building a space arena attached to an asteroid, we have just recently finished development, added a control center and thrusters and are able to control its orbit. That’s right; this tournament will be held out in space.”

“In space...” Adam mumbled. No one could believe what they were hearing.

“I’m also sure most of you are wondering why we are holding this tournament free of charge. To be blunt, it’s because we are more interested in MFs being used in sport then in war. We hope that this tournament will stall if not put the war to a halt so that everyone can sit and enjoy the spectacle of battle. Registration ends on February 18th, you have 6 weeks to enter. Once you are registered you and your MF plus one friend or family member will be transferred to the Genesis Space station, Prosperity and will live there until the end of the tournament. The tournament date is scheduled for March 1st, hope to see you all there...” Luscious finished his speech as the screen shut off leaving everyone in the club in darkness for a few moments. As the lights turned back on Adam sat staring outwards, a grin lighting his face.

“Oh no...you’re going to register aren’t you?” Sharon asked the minute she saw his face. Adam remained silent, and nodded.

“Normally I would do the exact opposite of my brother...but this might be a good opportunity to see what Genesis is doing...I’m in as well.” Stephen replied.

“What the hell can’t let you two have all the fun. I’m in.” Mario replied.

Heather sighed. “Fine, someone is going to need to look after you three. I’m in.”

“Well then, looks like we’re going to space.” Adam said.

Chapter Five: Decisions

The world was in a state of shock after the announcement of the Azure Cup; both military factions were left crippled as the majority of their MF pilots ran to register. Both the EAP and the TA became nothing more than a military with an air force along with ground troops and a few tanks. The politicians in the TA had little problem with the tournament and the massive amount of pilots who left to sign up, Genesis had come up with a way to divert attention from the war itself. Over the two weeks that had passed since the announcement people had been flocking to Genesis to find out all the information in regards to the Azure Cup, even some civilians decided to enter in hopes of proving their skill outside of the Virtual World. There was little the government could do since the contract between Genesis and TA allowed Luscious to hold any time of event regarding MFs, and that the MF pilots would be allowed to leave the military for the duration of the event. It was a clause that Luscious had hidden from plain sight; the MF pilots were technically working for Genesis as long as they piloted the frames. Some MF pilots did remain in the standard military only because they felt their skill was of a low class and wouldn't even make it far in the tournament. The barrier at the edge of the South Western territory remained intact while neither side approached. Unlike the tragic event that transpired 2 years ago there was no need for an armistice. The war continued on with little MF encounters and a high influence of ground troops and armored tanks. Mars lit up in battles once again, the battles were limited in locations and both sides suffered tremendous casualties. Despite the continuing tragedies on Mars Earth continued to remain in a general state of ecstasy over the idea of an internationally broadcast sporting event between the world's best MF pilots. The war remained strictly on Mars leaving Earth to remain in its state of false peace however the people didn't mind. Before the mention of the Azure Cup people were stricken with grief and fear over the war, they all feared that it might fall to Earth and battles would occur in their backyard. Luscious managed to out smart both governments, the EAP and the TA since they supplied basic MF parts to the EAP and the EAP's own organization, Revelation built and produced their MFs. Genesis mainly manufactured MFs for the TA, but still increased their profit by trading with Revelations out East.

The Azure Cup tournament already had a constant increasing number of competitors, currently with 4 weeks left until the registration deadline over 100 MF pilots signed up. The space station Prosperity was Genesis' crowning achievement in the past decades, it was a massive spherical like structure connected to an elongated rectangular structure by four tubes allowing for passage to either side

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of the station. Within the 2 weeks since the announcement over 50 pilots along with at least 45 civilians have been safely transported to the space station and are currently familiarizing themselves with the interior of the station.

Another shuttle prepared to leave from MacArthur spaceport, another good amount of pilots and friends continued to haul their luggage in anticipation.

“Are you really sure this is a good idea? I mean leaving the war in order to fight in a sporting event?” Heather asked as she dragged her suitcase along the ground. Adam smiled turning back to her.

“It’s fine; hopefully with the lack of MF pilots both sides will just stop fighting. It makes sense if you think about it. I mean with all of the MF pilots gone both the EAP and the TA are going to have to resort to using ground soldiers, by doing so there’s a bigger risk of a higher death rate. And if you’re feeling guilty about leaving think about this, if there aren’t any MFs to worry about then what would you do? They wouldn’t send out an MF platoon against ground soldiers. Not according to the Codes of Conduct in War contract created during the Humanitarian Treaty. MFs are only to be deployed if the other side is able to fight back with an MF.” Adam replied. Sharon nodded, she too was preparing to head out into space although it was against Adam’s judgment. Each competitor was allowed to bring one friend or family member for support.

“I guess...but still, I’m not sure why I’m going now. I mean I want to support you guys, but let’s face it; I’m not one of the most skilled MF pilots around. I’ll probably be knocked out in the first round.” Heather mentioned sullenly.

“I’m sure you’ll do fine.” Sharon blurted out from behind. Heather sighed, but then smiled back.

“Has anyone seen my brother? I mean he said he’d be here shortly.” Adam asked.

“He’s probably on his way...” Heather glared back at Adam with what appeared to be a half cocked smirk. Her eyebrows angled inwards, she knew something.

“What? What’s the look for?”

“It would appear that your friend, Ashley has taken a liking to him.” Heather replied.

“Ashley? Hahahaha, that’s a good one. What makes you say that?” Adam asked while trying to hold his gut from bursting. Heather smiled and nodded her head to the side. It took a second but Adam glanced over to the right; there was Stephen walking with his luggage and behind him was Ashley carrying a few bags as well.

“Ashley?!” Adam yelled.

Ashley pulled down her sun glasses a few inches to get a good view of Adam. Her hair was tied up in a pony tail flowing over her shoulder. Her lips thinned as they moved into a crescent formation that caused a few dimples to appear by her cheek.

“Hey Adam!” She yelled out as her head shot out over Stephen’s right shoulder. Stephen let out a sigh.

“Don’t tell me she’s coming too!” Adam remarked.

Ashley’s face turned bright red from anger, she pushed Stephen aside running up to Adam. Her bags dropped to the ground in her haste. Her finger extended out towards Adam’s face as she began to yell. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?! What?! You don’t want me to come? And I thought we were friends!” Her voice shrieked outwards, both Sharon and Heather just turned their heads so they wouldn’t have to watch the brawl. Stephen just stood covering his face with his right hand. Adam’s eyes were widened, every time he would attempt to make a rebuttal Ashley continued to yell.

“Will you two just drop it? I thought it would be nice for her to come along. I mean you two were childhood friends who just happened to run into one another. Besides I don’t really have anyone else to bring with such short notice.” Stephen mumbled.

“Sorry...I just wasn’t expecting you to come along. I mean don’t you have a job? A boyfriend? A life in general?” Adam asked.

“I do have a life; I’m just taking a vacation from it right now. I’m an operator for the military.”

Adam stood there in shock; he never had expected Ashley to be involved in the military, even if it was low risk job.

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“You’re an MF operator? Since when?”

“Ever since that day I almost lost my life. I realized that some things needed to be protected so I offered to help out in any way I could. I was always good with communications so I was assigned to operate some MF pilots...”

“Just recently she was transferred to our unit.” Stephen interrupted.

“Wait what?! You can’t be serious, what about Veronica?” Veronica was their operator, always had been since she brought Adam to the military exam.

“She quit...” Stephen mumbled.

“She quit? Why did she go and do that? She was perfect, she knew exactly how we fought as a team and was the best operator I had ever met.” Adam continued to blurt out.

“She has her reasons...but I figured that this tournament might do Ashley some good. She’ll be able to see how we fight, and this also gives us some time to get to know one another.” Stephen replied as he picked up his bags and began to head towards the entrance ramp. “We better hurry, the shuttle leaves in 40 minutes and Mario is already waiting for us on Prosperity.”

Adam cringed and then glanced at Ashley who just stuck her tongue out and picked up her luggage. Adam, Sharon and Heather just remained standing outside of the gate tunnel in awe.

“So, she’s our new operator huh...” Heather mumbled.

“It would seem so...” Adam replied.

“You think she’ll be able to handle it?”

Adam smirked. “She’s a strong person, the question is, can we handle her?”

Mario stood staring into the dark abyss that was space. He had already been on Prosperity for a week now and had familiarized himself with the majority of the station. He was amazed how the interior of Prosperity was like a massive mall; there were dozens of restaurants in the food court, a few MF part stores along with a clothing store. He wasn’t sure why the station would need all of these things but he figured that if they were all going to be living on Prosperity for the duration of the tournament Genesis was trying to make the pilots all feel at home. The pane glass window gave a good view of the Earth and the stars. Mario felt at peace for the first time in a long time.

“Mario Liberalis correct?” A feminine voice breached. Mario slightly turned around to notice a vibrant girl with short raven black hair and green eyes. Her skin was a dark shade of tan, the girl was wearing a black short sleeve shirt and denim jeans. Her lips were covered in a crimson gloss; they sparkled as she smiled back at him.

“Yes, I apologize but I’m not familiar with your name.” He mentioned.

“You wouldn’t, I’m just an Ensign in USMF. I’m currently stationed in the Procella unit. My name is Michelle Ferus.” Michelle said while she extended her right arm. Mario smiled and gladly accepted the hand shake.

“So you’re an Ensign in Chris’ unit huh? What made you come all the way up here?”

“Well everyone in Lieutenant Procella’s unit all registered and I didn’t want to be left on Mars by myself. I don’t really expect to go that far in the actual tournament.” Michelle replied.

“Eh, I’m sure you’re a lot better than you think.”

“Thanks...but, I’ve always wanted to ask. How is it fighting alongside the Novus brothers?”

The sheer mention of their name caused Mario’s confidence and ego to dwindle as he felt like a knife was trusted into his chest. He hated it when people especially girls would mention either Stephen or Adam. Even though he knew it was Stephen’s unit he always felt like his potential was being shoved into the shadows due to the mere Novus name.

“Eh, they’re nothing special. I don’t know how many times I had to bail their sorry asses out of a jam.” Mario replied laughing.

“You had to help them! Wow, you must be one incredibly skilled pilot. Would you mind showing me some of your moves?”

Mario’s eyes lit up instantly, they sparkled in the darkness of the corridor.

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“Michelle, I would be happy to show you my moves.” He replied.

Every seat in the training arena was filled by either MF pilots or spectators that came to Prosperity with their MF pilot friends. Mario’s eyes widened as this was the first time he had seen the training arena, it was nothing more than hundreds of seats in front of a massive pane glass window. Mario shrugged his shoulders glancing over to Michelle.

“Umm, where’s the arena?” Mario questioned. Michelle smirked and then pointed to the window. At first he saw nothing but then he noticed a flashing orange explosion all the way in the background of space. It was then that he put 2 and 2 together; the arena was out in space.

“They’re training in space? Out in space with no boundaries or solid ground?!” Mario took a gulp along with a deep breath. He never imagined fighting out in the depth of space before.

“Well there’s solid ground if you find some. There is debris from the asteroid belt randomly floating out there. But it’s not like you need solid ground since there is no gravity in space.” Michelle replied.

“I see...”

“I’m guessing you haven’t been down here once since you came to Prosperity. Well let me inform you then, the tournament matches are all going to be taking place out there... in space. That’s why Genesis created this training arena.”

“Huh? Wait a minute, if it’s a boundless arena in space, then how did Genesis make it?”

“Technically they didn’t make it, but they placed floating markers that are used to keep the pilots in this region of space. If they didn’t place the markers then who knows how far out the MFs would go. It would be possible that they would go out so far that they wouldn’t be able to come back and would be stranded in space forever.” Michelle replied.

“I see...so who’s out there now?” Mario asked.

“Umm, let’s see, there should be a display with the pilot’s names and general information...ah, here we go.” Michelle pointed to a small LCD screen that showed a picture of the pilot along with his or her MF’s information.

“Reine Proprius from the TA, piloting MF, Sigma. A medium armored quad-legged MF, equipped with a sextuple energy cannon attached to the back of the core, and holds a napalm rocket launcher, also comes equipped with an energy scythe. Hmm, seems impressive enough.” Mario mumbled.

“Who’s he fighting?” Michelle asked. Mario shrugged his shoulders and looked at the LCD one more time.

“It’s some guy calling himself Rebel358. Doesn’t say much about him or where he’s from, just that his MF is called Shadow and is a medium armored bipedal. Its armaments are a plasma rifle and just an energy saber...”

“That’s it? Just two weapons?!” Michelle exclaimed.

“Yeah, that’s what it says.” Mario replied. A massive bright explosion grabbed their attention. Out of the orange flickering light fell the quad MF, Sigma. The MF was a wreck, missing three out of the four legs; its core was bursting out sparks of electricity and its sextuple cannon was down to one remaining barrel. Suddenly the opposing MF, Shadow sped in front of Sigma aiming the plasma cannon at the core. Everyone watching jumped out of their seats as they watched spheres of fuchsia energy begin to formulate around the edge of the rifle as Sigma floated defenseless.

“NO! He’ll kill him!” Mario screamed.

Just then a thick beam of plasma energy fired only to tear through the remaining energy cannon on the back of Sigma.

“The match is over. Is there anyone here who can give me a sufficient warm up? If this is all this tournament has to offer then you all should go back to your stupid, fruitless war.” Rebel358 said over the intercom. The interference from the outside caused his voice to be distorted but the message was clear. His confidence was astounding but from the performance it was hard to discredit him. Sigma was disheveled while Shadow appeared to be in perfect condition. The beams of light that emanated from the

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sun glistened off the dark obsidian and red metallic armor as the MF floated in space. Mario's fist shook as he withheld his anger.

"That guy is mighty confident of himself...someone is going to have to shut him up." Mario mumbled. Michelle's eyes lit up brightly, she never had the pleasure of seeing any pilot from the Novus unit fight, she figured now might be her chance.

"Are you going to fight him?" Michelle asked.

"I should...but I said I'd show you my moves first." Mario replied, his arm now wrapped around Michelle's shoulders.

"I know. I thought this would have been the perfect time for you to show me your moves." Michelle replied.

"Oh...yeah, *those* moves. Right, then I guess...yeah I'll shut this ball of arrogance up!" Mario screamed.

"I wouldn't underestimate him if I were you!" A boyish voice boomed forth from behind. Mario quickly turned around to see a boy about 15 or 16 standing in front of him. The boy's dirty blonde hair covered his crimson tinted eyes.

"He has been fighting for over 12 hours straight now and hasn't been touched once. He doesn't seem to get exhausted either. He's probably too much for you to handle." The boy replied.

"What?!" Mario couldn't believe the audacity of this boy. He soon let his anger leave his body and he began to laugh.

"You're funny kid, what's your name?"

"I'm Zach and we've met before Mario Liberalis!" Zach exclaimed.

Mario leaned back onto the frigid and pallid wall behind him, his left hand scratching the lower part of his chin. He then leaned forward believing that he figured out where he met the boy before but in the midst of his leaning forward he sighed and shook his head.

"Nope, sorry. I think I would have remembered meeting a squirt like you."

"Squirt?! What the hell?! I met you at the edge of the South Western Territory! I'm the Whisper of Death!" Zach screamed.

"Oh, I wasn't aware that death was a prepubescent little boy." Mario replied with a grin.

"...YOU!!!"

"Come back when you're voice changes. I have battle to prepare for."

Chapter Six:

Mario strapped himself into his cockpit, the clicking sound that rings when the buckle locks into position became an addiction. He felt alive when he was in the cockpit; it wasn't about the battle just the anxiety that occurs right before an encounter. Normally he is calm; his nerves don't often freeze still and his stomach never aches but this time was different. Mario never fought in space before; he wasn't sure how he'd react to the lack of gravity. His fingers perpetually tapped on the edge of Anima's control panel, he bite his dry chapped lips as he awaited the green light to head out into the unknown. His opponent, Rebel358 wasn't known to most people. His records that were on display in the Genesis information system state that he has no affiliation to either the TA or the EAP. The fact that he had been out in space fighting other MF pilots for 12 hours straight didn't help ease the mind of Mario. He became concerned over it, Rebel's MF, Shadow was only equipped with two weapons which doesn't offer a tremendous variety of attack patterns. He sighed shaking off his anxiety; he began to try and sooth his soul, telling himself that he would prevail. As he glanced to the side wiping off the sweat that was dripping down his face and around the natural crevices of his face he noticed Michelle who was standing in front of the glass panel waiting for the battle to begin. Even though it was only a training match he took it with the utmost importance.

"I won't lose. Who does this guy think he is, claiming how everyone here is worthless...I'll show him!" Mario's pupils dilated; he was green for launch. His feet lightly angled forward putting pressure on the accelerator while Mario's hands firmly clutched the throttles. Shadow hovered just outside the launch panel, its mechanical arms interwoven across the chest in a seemingly relaxing state.

"Will you be the one? Will you be the one to satisfy my thirst?" The words ran out of the lips of Rebel358 with a fierce sharp tone. It was soft but at the same time powerful. Rebel358 slowly brought his arms out from his armpits placing them on the throttles. Anima burst out of the launch panel, at first Mario was fully aware of the lack of gravity. Anima felt lighter, a lot lighter than usual but that was the extent of the difference. Mario let off the accelerator draining the energy supply to the boosters. As the flames of energy slowly dimmed Anima continued to hover in the darkness of space. A smile quickly gleamed on Mario's face until he jumped out in a fit of joy.

"Perfect! Anima is so much lighter now which means I'll be so much faster! Hehehe...you're in for it now!"

Rebel358 smirked refusing to respond to what he deemed an immature gesture. He lived for three simple things, fight, grow and to survive, anything else was trivial.

"Not saying anything huh? I get it; you've just realized who you were fighting against. I give you mad props for having such a high level of endurance. But you must be drained from fighting so long. You may be a skilled opponent, but you are no match for my speed!" Mario continued to scream in anticipation. His own confidence had quickly turned into arrogance.

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“Pathetic. Your MF is indeed agile, I can tell just by looking at it. And you’re offensive capabilities are high indeed, but your armor is fragile, you had to sacrifice good armor for speed. One must begin to wonder if that was such a brilliant idea.” Rebel358 replied calmly.

Mario couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“What’s the point of armor if you’re not going to be hit?!” Mario screamed. He pushed the throttle forward as Anima exploded out of its hovering position. The white MF dashed forward holding the dual plasma cannon outwards. It was a simple tactic, one that Mario liked to use in order to get a good feel for his opponent. However this time wouldn’t be like any of the others, Shadow suddenly appeared inside the defenses of Anima. Mario was appalled and fell back into the cushion of his seat. As he snapped out of his trance he quickly began to move Anima’s left arm. Just as the energy whip began to move out from its hatch a blinding ivory flash sliced through the elbow joint of the left arm. As the left arm exploded leaving Anima with a single arm while the MF floated backwards in a horizontal position Shadow quickly sped away from Anima leaving Mario to float defenselessly. Mario struggled to force Anima to stand up in its normal vertical position. It was obvious that the previous attack caught him off guard, it managed to stir up that fear he felt earlier once again in the pit of his stomach. It was a nauseating feeling that affected his breathing rate and his vision. The cockpit began to spin in his eyes; Shadow became nothing more than a silhouette in the backdrop of the ominous wallpaper of space. Electric sparks continued to fly out from the severed joint, the cut was clean, perfect, and there were no rough edges.

“I guess you are not the one.” Rebel358 muttered.

“You...”

“You still wish to fight? Amusing, have you not yet deduced the fact that I am much faster than you’re eyes could follow?”

“I don’t care how fast you are...you are nothing more than a target, an obstacle to me now!” Mario screamed. Anima flipped upwards jumping into an offensive position. The massive plasma cannon detached from the back of Anima’s core flipping under the right armpit and into the right hand of his MF. Energy quickly began to formulate around the humming barrel. The bright crimson balls of energy lit up the area around Anima. Rebel358 smiled while tucking his arms neatly across his chest. Shadow soon reflected this, both of its legs extended fully while the metal arms moved across the core. Mario’s lips parted moving into his burning cheeks.

“How dare you insult me! TAKE THIS!” Mario fired the cannon with all of his anger and frustration.

As the massive beam of crimson energy zoomed across space Shadow remained motionless. Just as the beam approached Shadow a tingling sensation arose through Rebel’s mental being. His eyes burst open with intensity never before seen. Raging torrents of flames engulfed his already crimson pupils. Shadow moved too fast for the human registry to pick up, within a tenth of a second Shadow deflected the beam back towards Anima. Mario’s eyes shook with fear, every bone in his body began to tremble, he soon fell numb unable to defend. As the beam prepared to engulf the ivory MF Shadow sped past and knocked the beam away once again. The fuchsia flames emanating from his boosters sparkled dimly in front of Anima as the black MF descended.

“It would be a shame for you to die before the tournament began.”

His voice would normally infuriate Mario even more but he was still in a state of shock and denial. His head arched looming over his chest and legs. The dark brown pupils continued to quiver while his hands refused to move from the throttles. It was clear to him now that this Rebel358 was no mere pilot.

“I do hope there is someone out there that can quench my thirst.” Rebel replied one final time until he took Shadow away heading for the re-entry station. Anima continued to hover, lingering in the depth of space.

“I...I...lost...”

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Michelle stood leaning against the pane glass window, her hands imprinting themselves onto the frigid translucent layer. She didn't know what to think at the moment. Her attention was soon diverted to Zach chuckling under his breath. Michelle turned around, her raven hair floated through the air as her head turned.

"Why are you laughing?!"

Zach forced his mouth shut in an attempt to stop laughing, his cheeks turned red and his eyes shut leaving a crescent like shape.

"I'm sorry, but he had it coming. I mean, I tried to warn him but he just wouldn't listen."

"Leave him alone. He tried his best! I'd like to see you do any better."

"..." Zach's turned away from her piercing eyes only to gaze at the floor. "I did try....he was much more than I could ever hope to handle...it's funny you know. You think you're on top of everything and then suddenly you get knocked back down to reality. I got beaten pretty badly in the past few weeks, that's why I joined up for this tournament. I know there's a lot more for me to learn, arrogance gets you no where."

"I see..."

"That pilot...Rebel358, he's no ordinary pilot. His reflexes are above average, I don't think anyone could match him."

"I'm sure there's someone who can."

"Maybe...but there's something not human about that pilot...when we fought I was scared, for the first time in my life I was actually afraid; he has a demeanor about him that's calm it's frightening."

"Do you think he's going to win the entire tournament then?"

Zach's head slowly rose to look at Michelle in her eyes. He sighed; before he even began to spoke she knew what his answer would be. Michelle moved over to him placing her hand on his shoulder. Her instincts told her to move away as their skin touched, he felt empty in her opinion. She ignored it; to her it didn't make much sense since he appeared to be a lively energetic boy.

"Sorry..." Mario's voice mumbled. His tone was dull and sullen. Michelle and Zach quickly turned around to see Mario stumbling into the room with his crimson helmet hung over his shoulder. He looked horrible, his skin which was normal vibrant and dark was now pale and sickly. Michelle ran over to Mario just as his knees buckled causing his body to collapse to the ground. Mario glanced up at Michelle, her face began to fade blending into the background his eyes became heavy and they slowly shut as his consciousness faded.

"Hey...what the hell happened to him?!" A familiar voice rang; the last sound he heard before he passed out.

Mario was placed in the infirmary shortly after he passed out from the match. He laid peacefully under the ivory blankets under the careful supervision of the nurses. Michelle sat by his side in a plastic chair, she rested her head on the shelf nearby, it wasn't comfortable, but it gave the support she was looking for.

"So what exactly happened to him anyway?" Adam's voice echoed in the room. Adam stood at the door along with Stephen. Their shuttle had arrived 30 minutes prior, they were in the process of heading to their rooms when they came across the training room where they saw Mario stagger to the floor.

Michelle sighed briefly as she sat up.

"There was this pilot...Mario rushed out to face him and ended up losing...pretty bad." Michelle mumbled.

"So he got beaten. He does tend to take those kinds of things seriously. He's a bit melodramatic at times." Stephen replied.

"I'm not sure I've ever seen any one pilot an MF quite like that pilot before."

Adam's eyebrow raised, it was hard for him to admit that his interest had been tugged.

"Really? What's this pilot's name?" Adam asked.

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“Rebel358.” A boyish voice blurted out from behind the door. Adam and Stephen stepped to the side as Zach entered the infirmary along with Reine.

“Hey...Reine right?” Adam asked.

Reine smiled and nodded.

“The pilot who did this to your friend is called Rebel358. No one really knows anything more about him aside from his name.” Zach mumbled.

Adam glanced at Zach tilting his head. His fingers softly brushed against the skin on his face while his head tilted from side to side as he looked at Zach. Zach’s right eyebrow raised in confusion.

“What?”

“I remember you...you’re that kid from the EAP that I fought in the South Western Territory right?” Adam mumbled.

“Huh?! Then that means...you?! You’re the Azure Knight?!” Zach screamed in shock. Paying little attention to his surroundings he stumbled backwards bumping into the wall.

“Hehehe...yeah.” Adam replied meagerly as he scratched his head.

“Wait a minute, you’re Adam Novus?” Michelle interrupted.

Adam turned looking at Michelle and nodded.

“Yeah, don’t see why it’s such a big deal. More importantly, tell me more about this Rebel358.” Adam replied.

Reine stepped forward away from the wall.

“I fought him and he defeated me within seconds. I don’t know what to say about him other than he isn’t human. There’s no way he could be, his reflexes are way too fast. When his MF moves you can’t detect it. And just like that!” Reine pounded his fists together, “It’s over.”

Adam began to smile as he glanced at Stephen.

“Really, sounds like he’s quite the pilot. So I hear the tournament matches are all held out in space, is that true?” Adam changed the direction of the conversation; he always liked doing that in mid sentence.

“Uh yeah...there’s a training facility on the other side of the hallway.” Reine replied.

“I see, pity though, my MF is still be transported from Mars. It should be here within the week. Although I wish I could go train now.”

“Well, they have standard MFs in the hanger that can be signed out for use.” Zach replied.

Adam’s eyes lit up.

“Good. That’ll do just fine for now. Hey you...umm, sorry I didn’t catch your name.” Adam said pointing over to Michelle.

“It’s Michelle.” She replied.

“Ah ok, nice to meet you Michelle. Take care of Mario; I’m going to get some hours out in space!” Adam replied. Without giving her the chance to reply Adam jumped out in the hallway grabbing hold of the handle on the side of the wall. The pathways in the space station were void of any gravity; each side of the walls came equipped with a handle that would guide a passenger through the hallway to their destination. Stephen just looked at Adam with a blank expression; he couldn’t understand why he couldn’t wait for his MF to arrive.

“Is he always like that?” Michelle asked.

Stephen looked over at her and chuckled.

“Yeah, he’s very impatient.”

“So is it true?” Zach interrupted.

“Huh?” Stephen just stared back at the young pilot.

“I mean is it true that he defeated the Chimera; the MF that was said to be a god in its own rite?”

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“Well I don’t know about the Chimera being a god, but yeah...Adam defeated it...(but at what cost...)”

The transport handles in the hallways were not only effective but extremely fast. Within a couple of minutes Adam stood staring into the hanger. So far at least 50 customized MFs filled the garage. The hanger itself was massive, filled with pathways and wires all connecting to each MF. It was dark and surreal but Adam entered it anyway.

“You looking for something?” A voice quietly echoed.

“Oh, yeah I was wondering if I could use one of the standard MFs. You see I would like to try piloting out in space but my MF won’t be arriving for about a week.” Adam mumbled.

“Oh yeah that’s fine. I apologize but I don’t work here. I was just finishing some diagnostic tests on my MF. But you don’t have to ask, just take one out.” The man replied.

Adam nodded. “Thanks. I appreciate the information. I’m Adam Novus.”

“Adam Novus? The Azure Knight?” The man mumbled as he stepped out from the shadows. The man was about 6’1 with long charcoal and crimson hair tied in a pony tail. His skin was pale; the lack of color in his skin accentuated the crimson eyes that pierced through the darkness. He was already in a pilot suit holding his helmet close to his thigh.

“Yeah...why does everyone seem to know who I am? I’m not anything special.”

“Oh but you are special Adam, you’re unique. You defeated the Chimera, the original and its successor. Not many people could perform the feat that you did, that alone makes you unique.” The man replied. His voice was soft, but still managed to send chills down Adam’s spine. Thin hairs stood up along Adam’s arms and neck, there was a certain vibe emanating from this man, something wasn’t right but Adam didn’t know what.

“I see...”

“Maybe you are the one...”

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

“I know you do not have your MF but still, would you like to partake in a match?”

“A match huh? Well I don’t see the harm in that, I mean it will help me get used to fighting in space. Yeah sure, I’m game.” Adam replied.

“Excellent. I will meet you out there. Don’t forget to configure the MF’s OS for space combat. If the OS remains in a mode that is accustomed to gravity it won’t perform to its full potential” The man replied as he began to walk back into the shadows towards his MF.

“Thanks...HEY! I don’t even know your name.” Adam replied.

“Heh...people just call me Rebel358, it’s funny how our destinies have intertwined.”

Chapter Seven:

The concept of fighting out in an environment where gravity wasn't a factor was new to Adam. He wasn't sure what to make of it at first, the throttles felt lighter even the accelerators felt light; just a slight tap from the feet would ignite a burst of energy from the boosters. Regardless of the inexperience he was amazed at the sheer beauty that surrounded his position. The Earth glowed vibrantly as it slowly spun on its axis; the blue ball of life invoked an emotion that Adam had yet to feel in a long time; tranquility. It was hard to detach himself from the scenery, he was in fact out in space for a training match. Adam knew little about Rebel358 aside from what he had hear. The MF known as Shadow made its way out of Prosperity, dim flickering lights of energy emanating from the back of the core pushing the frame through space. Stars flickered brightly lighting up the darkness in an attempt to scare away the surreal shadow like environment that loomed. Adam smirked, by a first glimpse he wasn't too impressed with the Shadows but even taking that into consideration he was well aware that appearances were deceiving. His brown eyes slowly lingered from corner to corner, the standard MF that he was using was much different than the one he used to take the military exam in. The armament of weapons was different, a basic missile pack firmly attached to the broad square like shoulders. Adam was used to energy based weaponry, this time he would have to fight using solid weapons; he had no quarrel with an assault rifle but what he wasn't sure about was a solid metal sword that hung around the MF's chest. Because it was entirely made of metal it meant that it would be much heavier than a normal energy saber, and even though every object is essentially weightless in space the sword would have a much slower response time. Attached to the left arm was a dual howitzer launcher, the rockets that burst out from the barrels were powerful, strong enough to tear through the armor of a BXT, but they were slow and had a dreary reload rate. Before the battle even began he knew the stacks were against him, much higher than usual. The one thing he felt confident in was the idea that the MF was equipped with a heavy armor shroud, its defensive statistics against solid shell weapons were very high, but energy beams were its weakness, a few attacks from an energy round caused the shroud to discharge a dangerous amount of heat. And the radiator that was installed wasn't capable of handling such a high level of heat stress, and to make matters worse Adam realized that Shadow was heavily based on an energy offense.

"Already this battle isn't looking to be in my favor...hehe..." Adam mumbled, his fingers quickly continued to graze against the pallid key tabs on the control panel. The OS had been configured for space combat but the FCS wasn't on par with Adam's response time. From what he had seen the FCS had a .98 second delay before carrying out an action which was fine for most rookie pilots who needed extra time to verify a lock on, but Adam was used to performing with a .25 second delay. The screen was bright, emanating a light cerulean glow into the cockpit, the darkened shadows all ran from the light retreating to the corners and crevices of the cockpit.

"If I do this I might be able to get some good hits in, hehe, wow I didn't even notice the generator was an X-series. With this I won't be able to expand as much energy as I usually do, I'll have to keep a heavy eye on that too. Damn, there are too many variables when using this suite..." Adam continued to stare down the MF's specs, his eyes were already beginning to lose focus, the computer screen was incredibly bright making it difficult to stare for a long period of time. Adam sighed brushing his fingers through his hair, his body leaning back into the seat. Soft toned chuckles floated out from his lips, he then leaned forward placing his hands on top of the throttles.

Rebel358's eyes widened with a spark, his eyebrows curved upwards, it was a signal; he was ready for combat. With a flick of his wrist Shadow's generator began to pump energy throughout the MF.

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An eerie fuchsia glow began to emanate around the outer edges of Shadow's armor; an after effect from the generator.

"I see. So I take it that you are ready to engage. Shall I hold back until you are properly adjusted to the combat capabilities of that MF?" Rebel's voice was flowing, and full of confidence. He wasn't arrogant, just confident, there was a difference.

"Nah, I'm fine."

"As you wish then."

A quick jolt from the boosters and Shadow sped towards Adam. At first Adam was in shock from the speed that Shadow displayed. He felt like a rookie once again in this MF, frozen in awe over the abilities of his opponent. But it didn't last long; he was able to wake himself from the trance just before Shadow swung. Again Adam made a miscalculation, he never expected the MF to appear so suddenly and in an offensive position. His teeth grinding against one another he pulled the throttle inwards as fast as he could. The throttles were much harder to control; the added weight of the armor shroud was the cause. The MF barely managed to strafe to the side, as the bulky MF moved the left arm swung in upwards just scraping against the searing beam of energy that protruded from the saber in Shadow's right hand.

"Damn it!" Adam screamed.

Rebel358 remained emotionless, his face stern and focused. In his peripheral vision he noticed the silver MF quickly regaining its balance along with raising the dual howitzer launcher.

"It's a pity..." He mumbled under his cold breath.

Just as the rockets began to fire Shadow zoomed past the MF once again sending Adam back into his seat from the mere shock. Sweat slowly perspired from his pores, his body shaking, for the first time since he first fought the Chimera Adam was on edge. It didn't help that he was piloting what he felt was a worthless children's safety toy, with all the extra armor. But in truth the armor was only slowing him down in a weightless environment. Adam eyes shot open as he watched the left arm burst out in a quick spurt of flames. The arm slowly detached from the elbow joint in a clean slice and just floated lifeless in the dead abyss of space.

"Such speed...I've never seen anything like that before...(shit, I can't defeat him; not in this thing anyway. If I'm to have any chance of winning then I'm going to have to be smart...)"

The missile pack flipped open as dozens of crimson square boxes filled the display screen all solidifying around the blackish MF. With a sea of burning embers fueling his pupils Adam fired the barrage. Rebel's eyes slowly closed as Shadow sped forward towards the onslaught of metal warheads. Adam smirked, he figured that Rebel358 was the type of person to rush head into an attack if he was confident of his own speed; in a way they were alike.

Shadow nimbly strafed through the tempest of missiles avoiding every attack and slashing through some missiles. The silver MF had already taken off by this point and managed to get on the side of Shadow. Adam was reluctant to use the weapon, but it was his only means of close combat; the metallic sword. Just as the right arm swung fiercely the metallic sword cut through a few missiles that lingered. Shadow was gone, Adam began to look frantically but found nothing more than debris and looming stars in the distance.

"What the? Where the hell?!" Adam screamed. His voice cut out as he began to feel the brooding presence that Rebel358 and his MF managed to convey. At the last second the thrusters on the MF ignited pushing Adam to the side avoiding the oncoming attack. Shadow's left arm now slashed through nothing allowing what Adam believed to be a weak point revealed. He quickly turned back to the missile system and fired a bundle of salvos at Shadow. He was confident that at such a close range not even Shadow's above average speed would be of any use. But yet another amazing feat sent chills burning down his spine. All of the missiles exploded in a fiery splendor, smoke soon dissipated revealing a humming glowing crimson barrier of energy in between Adam's MF and Shadow. Adam gasped; he had only seen that barrier in a few places prior, the Chimera and the wall cutting off the South Western territory. While Adam sat crushed Shadow spun around kicking the silver MF in the side. Adam was tossed around inside the cockpit, his head crashing into the right display screen and then being tugged back into the other

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direction abruptly. He couldn't believe the skill level of his opponent, he knew it wasn't because of the MF he was piloting; even in Blue Dragon he wasn't sure if he could keep up with Shadow's movements. They were undetectable, however that didn't mean he was about to give up entirely.

"Hehe, you're a lot more skilled than I was lead to believe."

"As are you. No one has ever managed to dodge one of my attacks, let alone two. But that with standing, you are of no challenge to me, I really hope it is because your range of motion is restricted in that primitive MF."

"Heh...(this isn't good at all...)"

"So they've met so soon...this was quite unexpected." Luscious said as he took a sip of his mulled wine. Both Caleb and Severen sat comfortably on the leather couch in the main corporate lounge over seeing the battle.

"I think you have over estimated Novus Luscious. He can't keep up with the failure." Caleb replied.

"It may seem that way, but I'm pretty confident the young boy is just using this encounter to analyze Shadow. I mean why would he put all of his effort into a fight where the power, and speed of Shadow clearly out match the standard MF ten fold. You are still naïve Caleb, yes you understand how to fight and you do that quite splendidly I might add. But still, you rely on your power and instincts alone, that won't always get you through the battle. This is a tournament you know, and if one intends to be victorious then one needs to sacrifice pride for knowledge." Luscious replied. His fingers slowly rubbed against the outer edge of the red wine glass as it was placed on the table.

Caleb cringed, looking back at the flashes of light bursting out in space.

"You still haven't told me Luscious why you're having this tournament in the first place. I thought you wanted this war more than anyone. But you have taken out the single most important factor in this war. Without MFs each side is going to resort to using ineffective means of fighting. Foot soldiers and armored tanks...all fighting over an area neither side has been able to enter."

"It wasn't ineffective in the early 21st century, before Genesis advanced the concept of war." Luscious replied.

"True, but each side will sustain heavy casualties." Caleb replied.

"Doesn't make much of a difference to me if that happens. The way I see it, it's just saving me the trouble of doing that deed myself later on when the time is right and everything is set in motion. This tournament has brought together the best MF pilots Earth has to offer, we are seeing the cream of the crop here Caleb. Plus we still have a nearly infinite amount of lifeless purposeless clones awaiting programming." Luscious' plans were known only to him, Caleb and Severen were aware of the general idea but nothing in too much detail.

"Are you saying we're going to use the clones? They weren't just for research?" Severen interrupted.

"Of course we're going to use them. What was the point of spending all that money if we're just going to leave them floating in a tube?"

"I see...wait a minute?" It struck Caleb at that very instant, what Luscious was planning with the Azure Cup tournament. Even though the plan seemed a bit surreal at first Caleb realized that everything Luscious had been doing over the past few years were nothing short of idealistic.

"Just wait and watch how this all folds out. You will get your shot at Novus when the time comes. Until then, he needs to be paired with Rebel...it is something that will be of personal benefit to me later on...now just relax and enjoy the ride."

Adam was panting every few seconds that managed to pass. He even began to wonder how he was still piloting. His fingers were aching on the border of muscle spasms. Shadow continued to hover before him, mocking him as the light from the sun gleamed off the perfectly intact metallic armor. Adam's standard MF however was not holding up as well, the left arm was severed as was the right leg.

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The missile pack was out of ammo as was the assault rifle; he was left with the broad metallic sword. He sighed wiping the crimson trail of blood that ran down his nose.

“So I’m left with this useless sword huh...hehehe, not much hope here. I’m going to need a miracle for this one.”

“It was an entertaining battle. You are by far the most skilled opponent I have come to face here so far. It is no wonder that my counterpart is so interested in your abilities.” Rebel mentioned. Even though the two had been fighting profusely he still talked without a stall or pause in his breath. Adam stared wide eyed at Shadow; he wasn’t completely sure what he meant by “counterpart” but at the moment that didn’t matter. His original goal of seeing how Shadow moved and reacted had been attained a good amount of time ago. He just wanted to land a blow now. Something caught his attention, something he seemed to have over looked; it was the part specifications for the metallic sword.

“What is this? An energy beam edge? I wonder what that does.” Adam shrugged his shoulders; he already had nothing to lose. The MF’s right arm extended as the metallic sword became elongated. Then something new happened, two thin beams of crimson energy shot out running along the edges of the blade.

“Well its not a full energy beam, but it’ll do for now!”

“I see...”

“What the hell is Adam doing?!” Reine screamed as his hands pressed forcefully onto the pane window. Stephen just stood at the edge silent; his eyes thinned focusing on the frame structure of Shadow. His hands rested in his pants pocket while he remained collected. Both Reine and himself had walked out to the training room just to watch Adam in space and were shocked to see him in the midst of a battle with Rebel358.

“He can’t defeat him! So why is he still trying?” Reine continued to scream.

Stephen smirked.

“It is because he can’t win. I am positive that he is clearly aware of that right now.” Stephen replied.

“I see, is it because he’s using a standard MF instead of his own?”

Stephen sighed shaking his head.

“No, Adam knows there is a big gap between their skill levels. Even if he had his MF, he couldn’t win.”

“Huh?!” Reine appeared to be appalled by the lack of trust Stephen had for his brother’s skills.

“He’s probably trying to continue the fight so he can find any patterns in Rebel’s attack strategies...if there are any.”

The heated water pounded lightly onto their tan smooth skin. Steam filled the shower room as the water came into contact with the eloquently patterned tile floor. Her fingers moved slowly through her drenched shampoo soaked hair, rubbing softly against her scalp. Her eyes remained closed as she found herself in a state of ecstasy; her body was more relaxed than it had ever been in a while. Her chest rising with each passing breath, the aroma that filled the room was sweet and sensuous; naturally no man would ever get the chance to partake in the essence that was filling the room.

“So how long have you two been...you know dating?” Ashley’s voice broke the sensual silence that the girls had become accustomed to. Sharon’s eyes slowly opened, she smiled while continuing to rinse the shampoo out of her hair. The ivory velutinous suds of soap oscillated down her nude body caressing every alluring curve on her body.

“Well it’s hard to say, he has never gone as far as asking me to be his official girlfriend. But we’ve been very close for about 2 years now...” Sharon mumbled as the sound of the water impacting the floor echoed.

“Adam tends to be indecisive and just non-committing.” Heather interrupted as she was the first to step out of the shower. She began to dry her flourishing skin.

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Sharon chuckled a bit and continued to rinse her long dark brown hair.

“He was like that when I knew him too. Although it was never something as serious as a relationship, but still he could never be committed to a project. He would always just bail out at the last second.” Ashley replied.

“I don’t know, I just get this feeling when I’m around him...it’s kind of hard to explain it thoroughly.” Sharon replied, her hands clutching onto the opposing shoulders.

“Love huh.” Ashley replied.

Heather smirked and continued to dry off her body while Sharon just stopped what she was doing and turned completely towards Ashley. Ashley was smiled while Sharon just stood staring at her with a blank face blushing as the water continued to rinse the soap off her body.

“Heh, I can tell by the look in your face. You are in love.” Ashley replied.

“I...I...”

“Don’t worry about it Sha, we understand.” Heather replied as she began to get dressed.

“What about you Ashley?” Heather asked.

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

“We’ve seen the way you look at Stephen.” Sharon replied with a grin.

Ashley’s eyes widened, she turned around waving her arms from side to side. “Its nothing! We’re just friends...and he just happens to be cute.”

“Hahahaha...” Both Sharon and Heather began to laugh simulatenously. Then something strange happened, Sharon’s pupils went pale and she quickly clutched her heat. The laughing ceased and both Heather and Ashley jumped into Sharon’s stall with the water still running as they caught her limp body as it fell to the floor. Sharon’s breathing was sporadic and heavy.

“What happened?!” Ashley screamed.

“I...I don’t know!”

Adam’s eyes slowly closed leaving nothing but darkness in his wake. The last thing he saw was Shadow disengaging its energy saber. The silver MF floated lifelessly through space as nothing more than a severely damaged core.

Chapter Eight: War’s Escalation

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The lights flickered briskly while shadows danced in the corners of the room. Adam lay underneath the cloth blankets staring at the frail ceiling. He had been resting for a day since he met with Rebel358 in battle; never had he believed that someone as skilled as Rebel existed. Two layers of medical tape wrapped tightly around his forehead, the only significant injury that he sustained in the fight. Sharon had been in and out of the room the entire day; she too had collapsed under what the doctors referred to as unnoted chest trauma.

“You’re awake?”

Adam glanced at the door, there was his brother leaning against the plastic frame around the edge of the door.

“Yeah...”

“Took quite a beating out there didn’t you.” Stephen moved away from the wall and took a seat near the right side of the bed. Adam chuckled, it wasn’t just a beating; it was a massacre; he was outmatched.

“Just a bit.”

“Well either way, I tried to dig up some information on this Rebel358 character.”

Adam’s eyebrows tweaked with intrigue, his arms pushed downwards as his torso slid up against the back support of the bed.

“And?”

“I didn’t find out much. Except that he doesn’t have any form of identification that clearly puts him in any nation on Earth. There are no records of his birth or his existence for that matter. This guy, who ever he is, has made it his life living in the shadows of our world.” Stephen replied.

“I see...so he doesn’t exist then...heh heh.”

“You ok?”

“I’m fine. I’m not sure there’s any point of us staying here any longer. That guy, he’s going to win this tournament.” Adam mumbled.

Stephen sighed looking away from his brother. His dark brown eyes stared blankly at the tiled floor.

“I know...but it’s much better than being on either Earth or Mars at this point. That stupid war would just continue to get out of hand. At least being up here we can find out some information on Genesis.” Stephen replied.

“That’s the only reason I’m still here.” Adam replied.

“You’re awake!” Reine’s youthful voice broke through the room interrupting the two brother’s conversation. Both Adam and Stephen turned to the door where Reine and Zach both stood.

“Yeah, the injury wasn’t serious.” Adam replied.

“So what do you think of him?” Zach blurted out with no sign of restraint. His eyes were thinned focusing solely into the depth of Adam’s pupils; into his very soul.

“You really want to know?”

“Yes!” Zach’s response was crisp, clear and loud. His nerves were on edge, his body shaking and heart rate pulsating quickly.

“He’s going to dominate this tournament. No one is going to come close to beating him.” Adam replied.

That wasn’t the answer Zach wanted to hear, even though he didn’t say it, his expressionless face said everything. Reine’s eyes were wide while his mouth was gawked.

“You’re kidding. I mean it’s true you lost, but that’s only because you don’t have your MF!” The innocence of a child never ceased to amaze Adam, the purity that Reine held onto through his ignorance sparkled in his pupils. He remembered when he was that naïve, before his life was ripped to shreds.

“I wish. He’s on a different plateau than me; even if I was in Blue Dragon I couldn’t beat him. I could do much better, but it wouldn’t be enough.” Adam replied.

“You’re lying!” Reine screamed.

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Adam sighed. “No I’m not. You need to understand that there is always going to be someone better than you. But at the same time you need to grow for that experience.”

“You’re just giving up! What happened to you? You didn’t give up when you lost to the Chimera!” Reine yelled. Adam didn’t know how to respond to that, not many knew of the Chimera and what had really happened behind the mask of the media, it wasn’t for people to know. But that did not justify the fact that people didn’t know, and here was this kid not much older than he was when he encountered Chimera, his brother.

“That...that was different.”

“How? How was that different? Rebel beat you just like Chimera did, but then you just came back stronger to win! You refused to give up! So what’s different this time?”

Stephen did nothing but watch as everything continued to drag on. There wasn’t much he could do, this wasn’t his battle to face.

“There...there were more personal strings attached to Chimera. This, my encounter with Rebel was a match, a meaningless match and nothing more. We’re all here for this tournament, to find out who is the best MF pilot in the world. But just because we’re not on either Earth or Mars does not give us the right to forget about the war that is consuming our humanity. We are soldiers; most of us left to participate in this tournament hoping that the absence of MFs would limit the battles and eventually call for an end.”

Reine remained quiet but couldn’t stand listening to what was being said. With a quick tug he dashed out of the room. Zach just shrugged his shoulders and followed suite.

“You ok?” Stephen asked.

“I’m fine. He’s a kid.”

“A kid? He’s 2 years younger than you. Stop acting like you’re an adult, you’re 18. Don’t think I don’t know what you’re doing.”

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

“You think that by shunning your youth, your adolescence that you’ll be able to find the answers quicker. But all you’re doing is trying to carry the weight of everyone’s burdens on your shoulder. The death of Amy, Mike, Sean, Christina, Jen, Nick, and Sharon’s father, I know you blame yourself for all of them. You think that just because 2 years has passed that you’ve changed?”

“...”

“You haven’t, just because you hide the pain beneath the surface doesn’t mean it isn’t there. I agree that there is no real need to pursue Rebel358 based only on the fact that you lost...but on the fact that he doesn’t exist.” Stephen replied.

Adam turned to his brother, he was confused.

“What are you suggesting?”

“Well, it seems kind of odd that a pilot that skilled doesn’t exist on paper.”

“You think something isn’t right?”

“Yeah. And I’m also concerned about what you told me, about how Genesis has a good amount of cloned humans in their closet. That and the connection between them and the Chimera still bothers me. It’s worth investigating.”

“I see. So what do you suggest Stephen?”

“That’s simple. The longer we stay in the tournament the more time we have to search for clues. So let’s make it to the finals.” Stephen replied.

“Heh...to the finals then.” Adam replied.

The television screen scared the darkness away, sending it into seclusion behind objects in the room. Luscious sat as the sides of the leather cushions conformed around his ribs. It always bugged him, the constant squeaking that came with any slight movement in a leather chair or couch. His right leg crossed over his left as his right hand rested with a glass of merlot clutched in between his fingers. He smiled, things had been going exactly as he had planned for the past 5 years of his life, and the war

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between the EAP and the TA had become public knowledge through the backstabbing technique employed by the TA. Luscious had taken away the very thing that made the wars in the AR period a gleaming spectacle; the MFs. Without MFs at either side's disposal the war was diminished to fighting with armored tanks, fighter planes, and soldiers on feet with advanced fire arms. It had been documented that the battles that took place with MFs that casualties were at an all time low, under the hundreds even. MFs fight until their generator either shuts off or the pilot ejects. Most of the times MF pilots realize when they're out match and end the fight, by doing this, deaths during missions and battles have gone down. But now without equal battalions there are no more restrictions, soldiers continue to gun down their enemies without mercy. Fighter planes fly through the sky in unique formations alongside other fighter pilots as their turrets fire, shooting down other planes. The fragile frame of a fighter plane can not protect the life of the pilot like the heavily armored MF can, planes crash into the ground exploding into a sea of flames as their pilots scream for help. This kind of brutality during battle had not been seen since the late 21st century, before the development of the Mechanized Frame. Luscious continued to sip his distilled wine as his space satellites fed him live videos of battles occurring on Mars. The carnage, the bloodshed seemed to invoke ecstasy within himself; there was no other feeling even close to this.

"Humans...easily manipulated, quick to pull the trigger, to kill their own brothers and sisters for the sake of their own greed; they continue to fight for a land that they could never possibly fathom. The South Western territories as these factions call will never open for the likes of them." Luscious mumbled to himself.

A squadron of fighter planes soared steering to the right, their thin wings slicing through the ivory clouds as they passed. Emblems of the TA singed onto the nose of the planes were apparent as the planes passed through the crimson dusk. The lead pilot's eyes thinned, a lock on box rotated around an object that was hidden behind the think layers of nimbus clouds in front.

"Heh, gotcha you son of a bitch!" The pilot screamed. His index finger, quivering, pulled back on the trigger. The reaction caused two missiles attached just under the wing to launch. As grey hued spherical bundles of smoke trailed from the back of the missiles the squadron strafed to the right in hopes of getting around the object that was their target.

Suddenly the pilots were rocked in their cockpits as a tremendous explosion forced the nimbus clouds to disperse allowing torrents of fire to spiral outwards. It was a horrendous sound, the explosion of a target, it wasn't the crackling sound of singed metal that ate at the souls of the pilots, it was that one second, in that one second they could hear the voice of their enemy screaming in agony as his flesh was burned and his insides ruptured from the force of the blast. It was a single second, one that would normally pass without anyone giving it a second thought, but up in the air things were different, an entire life can be replayed in a single second.

"Nice shot Otium!" His comrade screamed.

Pilot Third Class Eric Otium was an up and coming ace in the Air Force; he had managed to take out 6 bogeys in a single sortie by himself. He was a near perfect shot with a hit percentage of 96.9 %. Since the MF pilots had moved to the Prosperity space station the USAF were transferred to Mars in hopes of gaining an edge in the war against the EAP. Unfortunately for them the EAP also transferred their Air Force to Mars. There hadn't been many battles since the MF teams for both sides left; any minuscule battle that took place always took place at the edge of the South Western barrier.

"Otium what do you think that was anyway?" His fellow 3rd Class pilot, Anthony Ramiro exclaimed. The two had been stationed together since they joined the military at 18, they were now 22. They both managed to climb the ranks into the USAF's top flying battalion, known to all as Red Fury. They were lead by the a 3-time USAF Ace, Carlos Redentore a 23 year old who had flying encoded into his DNA. He was a natural born flyer.

"Keep quiet you two! We're not out of the woods yet. Those BXTs are doing some heavy damage, our AT's can't stand up to them!" Carlos screamed out.

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“BXTs? Those behemoths, what the hell can we do? Our missiles might be able to dent their armor but we’re like paper in comparison to their overwhelming fire power!” Anthony screamed.

“That may be true, but look at it this way; we take them down then we’re heroes. Now there are 3 all together, it would be suicide for each of us to try and take one down alone. So we’ll stick together and assault one at a time. Our other team from Fury is already moving to intercept the EAP’s air force.”

Carlos replied.

“So those Euro-Asians brought their flies to Mars as well huh. Damn, I was hoping to get a shot at them.” Eric mentioned.

“Don’t worry about them. You’ll get your chance when the time comes. Right now we need to stop those BXTs!” Carlos screamed.

“Roger!” Both Eric and Anthony replied.

The three planes cut to the side and began their descent towards the first BXT. Armored Tanks were exploding into pieces left and right, the slow moving weapons were unable to stand up to the high intensity grenade cannons. Soldiers jumped and ran their way away from the BXTs, assault rifles flopped to the ground as each soldier disregarded their weapons so they could flee to safety. The battle was a massacre; the EAP continued to march their way through the TA forces like they were not even there. EAP ATs treaded along the grounds as soldier stood on top of the machine firing rounds through the flesh of TA soldiers. Snipers lay hidden in the hill tops surrounding the energy barrier, their scopes constantly zoomed in allowing each patient sniper a clean head shot. The TA soldiers continued to fall like bugs, the only thing keeping the TA in the fight was their Air Force; they were second to none.

The first BXT slowly moved forward crushing the ATs under its metallic glistening feet; soldiers flew through the air as the ATs exploded sending a force of energy outwards. The BXT stumbled as it was bombarded with 6 missiles that collided with the core of the titanic machine. As the BXT stumbled the three fighter planes zoomed past while unleashing streams of golden bullets. The bullets did nothing but bounce off the bronze armor.

“Damn, that attack had no affect!” Anthony screamed.

“We’ll aim for the joints connecting the grenade cannons to the core. Those are the weak points. Every machine has a weak point!” Carlos yelled back.

The three planes cut sharply in a tight formation tearing through the clouds as they prepared to fall back onto the single BXT. The pilots in the BXT did nothing but grin. The two grenade cannons rotated upwards and with a gigantic jerk fired. Carlos’ eyes widened as the massive blast approached at tremendous speed.

“SEPARATE!” Eric screamed at the last second. The orange blast seared through the air as the planes tilted to their sides, flying nearly perpendicular to the horizontal clouds the planes dispersed at separate directions. As they avoided the blast they quickly regained formation.

“That was close! You guys ok?” Carlos beckoned.

“Yeah, I’m fine...just a little shaken up.” Anthony replied.

“..*huff* yeah... *huff* I’m good.” Eric replied.

“Good, let’s finish this!” Carlos yelled.

Rectangular lock-on boxes solidified around the spherical joints connecting the cannons to the core. The BXT began to fire random grenade rounds into the sky hoping to connect, but each time the planes of Red Fury managed to avoid them only to draw closer. As the planes came less than 100 meters away from the BXT their lock-ons turned red from green, they were good to go.

“FIRE!” Carlos yelled. And with that single command each remaining missile on their planes burst of all heading for the specific joints. In that single second tensions were high as the missiles connected with their target. The first two missiles exploded into the joint causing flames to erupt through the armor, but the cannon still remained until the next two missile shot through the joint lodging the warheads into the wound which ultimately lead to the outer brim of the BXT cockpit. And once again there was that scream, refusing to be late for its performance. Flames began to rupture out from various

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angles of the BXT as the massive machine fell to the ground in shambles. The three fighter planes flew through the smoke that loomed over the fallen beast, they had been victorious.

Hundreds of soldiers on both the EAP and the TA lay on the ground soaked in their own crimson blood, their lives expunged and neither campaign truly victorious. A single BXT taken down by mere fighter planes left a sense of fear etched into the hearts of the EAP soldiers.

Luscious began to smile once again as he placed his empty wine glass on the coffee table in front of him. He hadn't been able to see such a site where human despair and hope was at an all time high along with fear of death.

"Can you believe that this is happening all in an effort to make it into our paradise?" Luscious questioned.

"No, I can. Humans strive to understand what is foreign to them. But what puzzles me is their need to rip away the one thing that made them so curious in the first place only to replace it with what is more familiar to themselves. Once they made it to Mars they began to treat it like the Middle East, they tried to rape it for its resources and went to war because of it. They must be purged." The voice spoke.

"Ah, you are correct. Humans must be extinguished so we can recreate this world without sin. And you are the first of many human-like beings void of sin. Revel in that fact; you are the first success of many." Luscious continued to talk as he began to fill his glass with more merlot.

"I see nothing special about this Adam Novus Luscious..." The voice continued on. Luscious' attention was grabbed, his eyebrow arched upwards at an angle. He put down the bottle and wine glass; he reclined back into the couch and crossed his legs while he stared at the man that stood before him.

"Well what did you expect? He was in a defective standard MF. Plus it was his first battle in space, I could have told you that his performance was going to be poor...but that isn't the case though. He did manage to out maneuver you a few times, and he was more of a challenge than the ones you fought; pilots who used their own MFs. Just wait until the tournament begins, and then you'll begin to understand why I want the Dragon." Luscious replied.

"This tournament is nothing but a child's game Luscious. I am going to win; no one here is good enough to even keep up with my attacks. So if you know the outcome, then what is the point of going through with it?"

"Hmm, you still don't understand. It's the journey that counts, not the beginning or the end. In time you will understand. Be patient. The first round starts in 3 days." Luscious replied.

"Adam! You're alright!" Sharon's voice boomed outwards as he and Stephen entered the main lounge for the pilots. Adam nodded his head but continued to move forward.

"I'm fine. It's of no concern." He replied.

"I know...by now I'm used to you ending up in the hospital. But...but I felt you this time. I felt you when you got hurt, and it affected me as well." Sharon mentioned.

Adam glanced at her with an awkward stare, he wanted to laugh it off, but he wasn't sure she was completely off. Just before he passed out from his injury he felt a soothing presence wrapping around his body as if to protect him from danger. He smiled at Sharon and patted her shoulder gently as he walked past her. The lounge was full of MF pilots all staring at a massive LCD screen that listed the matches for the first round of the Azure Cup Tournament. In total there were 128 entrants into the tournament, a much bigger number than everyone had originally expected. With a number this high every pilot had their work cut out for them.

The structure of the tournament was broken down into 8 sections, starting with the letter 'A' and ending with the letter 'I', each section was then broken into 2 subsets, '1' and '2' each subset contained 8 pilots. Each group has their own final round to determine the champion of that group, and then the champion from each group fight against one another until there would be only one pilot remaining at the top. Adam smirked; he couldn't wait for the tournament to begin in 3 days.

Chapter Nine: The Tournament Begins

The Azure Cup was underway, the matches were decided for the first around and the excitement could barely be contained. 128 MF pilots, each striving for the top honors of being the best of the best, the space arena glistened brightly as the sun's beams spread across space. The first match of the tournament was only moments away from beginning. Adam and Stephen were stuck sitting in the crowd, they had at least 5 days before their own matches would be underway. The tournament was too big to be straight forward and need to be divided up into 8 sections. 'A' through 'I', right now section 'A' was up for their first round. The first day was completely devoted to both groups of section 'A', 'A-1' and 'A-2.' The matches for the day were:

A-1

**Zach Orion Vs. Reine Proprius
Leo Ombra Vs. Severen Prodito**

Heather Pertencia Vs. Miguel Castril

Michelle Dolce Vs. Alex Altanero

A-2

Fenrir Vs. Chris Procella

Caleb Prodito Vs. Josh Envidia

Ryan Houston Vs. Jason Letum

Vagrant Vs. Solice

The first 16 matches of the tournament were scheduled for the entire day. The first match Zach and Reine was scheduled in the early morning around 7 am, if Adam didn't know either of them he knew he would never have gotten up this early. What surprised Adam as well as Stephen was that Severen, one of the "Twins of Genesis" was participating in the tournament. They were both well aware that Caleb was the MF pilot of the two, and weren't sure what Severen hoped to gain by entering the tournament. Adam yawned as his limbs stretched outwards into the air, his boredom was apparent. They had been sitting in the same harsh seats for the past hour as they waited for the match to begin. Heather was in the hanger making some adjustments to Blue Angel as she was scheduled for the third match of the day; Sharon accompanied her along with Ashley. It seemed that the three of them were becoming close friends, Adam was thrilled; he wanted Sharon to have friends, to have fun. Ashley unexpectedly showed up as their teams' new OM (Operations Manager), so he was happy that she was taking the time to get to know Heather. This left Adam and Stephen in the crowd by themselves. Adam softly nudged his brother in the gut to grab his attention.

"Hey, where's Mario been anyway? I haven't seen him since we got here about a week ago."

Adam replied.

"Oh, yeah I forgot. He's been spending time with that Michelle girl, Michelle Dolce."

"Hehe, I see."

"Yeah, so I'm guessing that he's with her right now, helping her get ready for her match today."

Stephen replied.

"I see... I don't know about you, but I hate having to wait. I mean I'm stuck in 'E' section, I have to wait until the 5th day of the tournament before I can fight. Meanwhile I'm stuck here watching everyone else." Adam replied. He hated waiting, he had been anxious about this tournament since it was announced. Every nerve in his body was on end, he wanted the chance to fight against the very best Earth had to offer, without worrying about having to take a life. That was the thing about war; you were expected to finish off the opposing MF, possibly taking the pilot's life. Adam hated that, he had respect for anyone who entered the cockpit of an MF; they were all the same after all. Fighting in order to protect their ideals, only he wasn't sure what the TA was fighting for. The lights in the massive dome like structure began to dim while a massive LCD screen flickered on giving an image of space. It was a sight to behold, the abyss of vast darkness out stretching towards infinity, the boundary between Heaven and our world, or Hell. Two small dots sparkled in the distance, Zach and Reine were preparing for the match to go underway. Reine's MF, Sigma floated eloquently with its weapons held to its side in preparation for the match to begin. Inside the cockpit his heart was racing, he hadn't been performing any extraneous activities and yet he was sweating; he was nervous. He and Zach had become friends in the short period of time they had known one another, but they were about the same age, the youngest pilots registered in the tournament; they had to stick together. It didn't matter that they were from different sides of the war, Zach from the EAP and Reine from the TA. Zach on the other hand was reacting in an opposite way, he was calm, focused and determined to win the match. His MF Hades was redesigned after his encounter with Adam on Mars. The orange and black MF held onto an energy scythe like Sigma, but was fueled with crimson energy. It was also modified to be able to send out waves of devastating energy. The right arm held onto a dual plasma rifle, a single round could cause the radiator of an MF to overload. Zach was eager to test out his new energy shield and energy scythe, since there was no gravity in space he figured

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that Hades could be equipped with a powerful rain cannon and wouldn't have to worry about the weight killing his mobility. The two friends who by luck met in the first round of the Azure Cup firmly held onto their throttles awaiting the green light.

"Who do you think is going to win this?" Stephen asked glancing over to his brother. Adam shrugged his shoulder as he took a sip of his cola.

"We'll have to wait and see...but if I have to make a guess, then I'm going to go with Zach." Adam replied.

"Zach huh. I'd have to agree with you. Reine is a good pilot, but fumbles under pressure." An eerie yet familiar voice interrupted from above. Adam and Stephen turned; Caleb Prodito stood on the outside of their row. It had been about 2 years since the three of them had been in contact, Adam didn't know what to say. Here was a person who hid the truth from them, worked for Genesis and pretended to be their fellow pilot. At the moment, Adam didn't have any love loss for anyone related to Genesis.

"Caleb..." Adam mumbled.

"Adam Novus. Its been a while." Caleb replied.

"Not long enough I suppose." Adam replied, the sarcasm was distinct, he wanted nothing to do with Caleb.

"Hmm, I guess I deserve that. I mean not telling you who I was."

"You lied."

"I don't think I lied...no, no I didn't lie. I never said I wasn't an heir to Genesis. I just chose not to tell you, that isn't lying."

"That maybe true, but you should have told us. You knew about Chimer and my brother!" Adam's voice began to rise; Caleb definitely was not a person he wanted to see at the moment. Stephen calmly placed his hand onto Adam's shoulder, the slightest graze from his fingers caused Adam's shoulders to flinch upwards.

"I knew nothing of that incident. I apologize Adam, but I have a match to prepare for. I hope that we get a chance to continue this conversation...in battle perhaps?" Caleb mentioned as he sneered walking away. Adam had to hold himself from jumping out of his seat.

"In battle huh? Hehe, I hope you last long enough to meet me..."

"Calm down, the battle started." Stephen replied.

The battle was indeed underway, bright crimson explosions filled the screen. Both Reine and Zach were moving too fast for the cameras to pick up. Their trails of energy were all that could be traced by the human eye. Adam smirked as he reclined back into his uncomfortable seat. His legs extended upwards resting on the top of the seat in front of him.

"This should be fun to watch."

Hades dashed to and fro avoiding the six beams of energy that seared through space. The crimson beams shot passed the orange MF emanating a gleam of red light to reflect off the glossy metal of the MF's armor. Zach's eyes widened, Sigma rode behind the attack as a means of cover. Both arms of Sigma swung inwards as the energy scythe slashed through the upper layer of orange armor. The attack caused Hades to be thrown backwards violently. Zach smiled, his adrenaline was pumping at full capacity, and his blood was thickening causing his heart to beat faster with each second.

"Impressive Reine! You caught me off guard with that one!" Zach screamed. The sound of his voice dug itself into Reine's ears. Hades flipped over regaining control; the boosters ignited fiercely, the massive crimson flames palpated as the MF increased in velocity. Two thick beams of energy fired and blew up on the core of Sigma sending the MF flying backwards. Hades quickly boosted towards the out of control Sigma while firing blasts of heated plasma. Reine quickly turned the throttles to the side in an attempt to avoid the attacks. As the beams zoomed past they managed to clip two of Sigma's four legs. The explosion of quickly spewing flames caused Sigma's stability to become unbalanced. The throttle to

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mechanics was now distorted; the response was rugged and harsh. Sweat constantly flowed out of the pores on Reine's face; his pupils began to fade from reality as he was sent into a dark shadowy abyss of fear. He could no longer control Sigma efficiently; his body fell faint as his arms slowly reclined to the side of his seat. Zach refused to let up now, all he saw was Sigma floating with its guard open for attack. Zach's feet lightly angled over the accelerator sending even more thrust into the boosters. Hades began to emanate a slightly golden glow around core; the light began to quiver brightly grabbing the attention of every spectator.

The dual plasma rifle suddenly dropped from the right arm as Hades grabbed onto its energy scythe. Zach became engulfed in his adrenaline unable to even think, his mind set on one thing; winning. The energy extended out from the scythe as Hades closed in on Sigma. Suddenly just as Hades prepared to strike Reine's eyes burst open with a crimson glare never before seen, his fear appeared to vanish as his hands quickly grabbed onto the throttles. The head unit of Sigma abruptly began to emanate a crimson glow as well. The fingers of the MF firmly wrapped around its own energy scythe. Zach paid no attention to the movement of Sigma and quickly forced Hades to attack. Just as the energy scythe slashed through space it abruptly halted as it was blocked by the steam of Sigma's own energy scythe. The entire crowd shouted a loud sigh in response to the shock. Adam continued to smile as he took a bite from his sandwich.

"I knew it wasn't over yet." Adam replied.

"What the hell?!" Zach screamed, he couldn't understand how Reine could have countered his attack when just a second ago Sigma appeared to be lifeless.

"..." Reine remained quiet, his eyes thinning narrowing his vision to focus on Hades and nothing else. His mouth opened wide to allow a massive low pitch scream to burst forward. Reine's body leaned forward as he pushed the throttles with all of his strength. Sigma instantly reacted pushing the energy scythe forward; Hades refused to budge and continued to hold Sigma at bay. Zach's eyes twitched as he saw the bright crimson flames explode out from Sigma's boosters. Sigma began to slowly move forward pushing Hades back a few feet. His ivory teeth began to grind against one another in a fit of rage, he refused to lose in the first round.

"I won't lose!" Zach screamed. Hades then kicked Sigma's core with its right leg knocking the MF off balance once again. Just as Hades began to swing the right arm Sigma's sextuple energy cannon lifted up and fired. The six beams of energy burst into Hades knocking the orange MF away from Reine. As a mound of caliginous smoke lingered in space Sigma boosted forward. Zach shook his head from side to side as he pushed his body up from the control panel. His pupils faded and his emotions took control, the glow around Hades began to flicker even brighter. The spectacle caused Sigma to halt in its movements, and then Hades erupted from the smoke and zoomed past Sigma slicing through Sigma's left arm. Sparks of electricity gleamed around the metal wound. Hades then turned around and dashed past Sigma once again and sliced off the right arm. Sigma jerked from side to side as Hades continued to speed past the MF swinging its energy scythe. Inside the cockpit Reine was thrown from side to side, his head smacking into the display screen causing the plastic cover in his helmet to shatter into thousands of pieces. The pieces slit through his skin, while others lodged themselves securely in his face. Streams of blood combined with his sweat dribbled down his face as he came to his senses. His chest rising with his racing heart beat. He then screamed in agony over the burning sensation that now engulfed his face. The scream echoed throughout space and into Hades' cockpit. Zach then woke up from his own trance realizing that his friend was severely injured. As Hades slowed down Sigma was revealed in shambles, the cockpit was left as it was surrounded by its slain metallic limbs.

"Reine..." Zach mumbled.

"AH!!!!IT BURNS!!!! IT BURNS!!!!" Reine continued to scream over and over again. Both Adam and Stephen jumped from their seats as did the rest of the spectators.

"Zach..." Adam mumbled softly.

From the back of the dome Rebel358 stood leaning against the wall chuckling under his breath.

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“Heh, the young H-3 is maturing this fast. This was unexpected. Well then, hopefully you will last long enough to face me in this tournament. I would like the chance to be able assess your talents...” He mumbled to himself as he slowly walked out the door.

“Do you think I’ll win?” Heather asked as she strapped herself into Blue Angel’s cockpit.

Sharon and Ashley looked at one another and simply smiled.

“You’ll kick that guys’ ass!” Ashley said as she winked.

“Thanks you two, Sharon I’m concerned that you didn’t get enough rest though.” Heather mentioned.

Sharon sighed; she then brushed her hair behind her ear and smiled. She always did that, smiled against negativity.

“I’m fine. Just concern yourself with the match ahead. You want to beat out those guys don’t ya?” Sharon replied.

“Heh, that won’t happen. But I’d like to make it past the first round.” Heather replied.

“I’m sure you will.” Ashley replied.

Heather Pertencia, please move your MF to the catapult and prepare for launch

The voice boomed over the intercom. Now was the time, she had always fought in the shadows of Adam and the others, but this was her time to shine. Heather smirked as she stuck out her thumb to both Ashley and Sharon who did the same. Both of the girls floated down from Blue Angel’s cockpit towards the stable ground. Their hair flapping through the air conditioned hanger as their bodies floated like angels with flapping wings.

“So seriously what happened to you?” Ashley asked.

Sharon glanced at Ashley; the truth of the matter was that she didn’t know exactly what happened. The doctors told her she was a perfectly healthy woman, and that they saw no traces of anything that could be considered a health risk. What happened was a complete mystery.

“I’ll tell you what I believe happened. They said that Adam passed out from pain in his cockpit at about the same time right?” Ashley asked.

Sharon nodded, although she had no clue where Ashley was going with this.

“Well I believe that the love you two share for one another created a mental bond. When one is in pain the other shares it and vice versa. So I think you felt his pain in the shower.”

Sharon appeared shocked at first; she had never stopped to even think that was a possibility. She loved Adam, more so than she did anyone else in her life aside from her family. And right now he was the only family she had left in this world. Her hands clasped each other in front of her chest; tears began to sneak through her sealed eye lids and rolled down her cheek.

“Heh, see.” Ashley mentioned as she hugged Sharon.

“I love him...” Sharon mumbled.

Adam and Stephen stood in the hanger as Hades and Sigma re-entered. Zach was declared the winner and moved onto the second round of the tournament. As Hades’ cockpit opened Zach jumped out floating over to Sigma as the medics lifted Reine’s seemingly lifeless body onto a stretcher.

“REINE!” Zach screamed as he tried to flap his arms in an attempt to move faster. The medics ignored Zach and moved Reine towards the ground in order to get him to the infirmary. Stephen jumped into the gravitation-less atmosphere grabbing onto Zach.

“Its alright they’ll take care of him.” Stephen mumbled.

Zach fussed; he jerked his body as he cried. His tears forming bubbles floated out of his eyes and hovered eloquently in the air. His hair waving smacking Stephen’s face as Zach continued to bawl.

“Its... *sniff*...its... *sniff* my FAULT! *sniff*” Zach yelled.

“It’s not your fault. Reine knew the risks of piloting an MF. We are all aware of the danger. Get a hold of yourself.” Stephen replied.

Adam sighed and glanced upwards, there was a TV screen displaying the second match of the tournament. An unknown MF pilot, Leo Ombra fighting against Severen; Adam smirked and turned all of his attention to the match.

A crimson and grey MF dashed from left to right avoiding every bullet that the light weight green MF fired. Under the image of the battle were images of both MFs, the crimson and grey MF was known as Forsaken and was registered to Leo Ombra and the other was Severen’s; it appeared to be a cheap knock off of Caleb’s Gemini only with two assault rifles. A blinding ivory explosion filled the screen, as the explosion began to dissipate the green MF floated covered in sparks of electricity torn to pieces with only the cockpit remaining. Forsaken lingered behind holding up two energy sabers with searing beams of energy. The announcer soon made the message clear that Leo Ombra was the victor. Leo had just made the record for match length, the match ended in 30 seconds. A chill shook Adam’s body; he had never expected the pilots partaking in the tournament would have such a high level of skill and grace.

“Hi, I’m Stephanie Star standing outside of the tournament grounds just inside Prosperity. The Azure Cup is well underway, the first two matches have been concluded and what matches they were! I have never seen such excitement before. Keep watching as GNT brings you the third match in the first round of the tournament. Heather Pertencia versus Miguel Castril!”

Adam smirked... he couldn’t wait for his turn.

Chapter Ten: Angel’s Ascent

Heather’s nerves were on end, her fingers recurrently tapped against the plastic obsidian throttle. Her thighs bounced up and down she tried to stop them but it was automatic, she was nervous. As the plastic face protector slid closed covering her eyes her breathing became erratic. Small clusters of grayish fog caressed against the inside of the protector causing her vision to become distorted. In front of her was her opponent, Miguel Castril, he was an Elite Pilot in the TA, specifically connected to Chris Procella’s unit. The MF that lingered in front of her was classified as a heavy assault model; the block-like armor made it a mere repugnant sight to behold. But that didn’t make it any less of a threat, both arm units were attached to high powered grenade rifles, while the shoulders and the back were brimming with missile pads, it seemed a bit excessive in Heather’s opinion. Miguel’s MF, Chaos was a close to mid range MF while Heather has specialized in long range combat for the past 2 years, it was going to be an up hill battle for her she thought. She wiggled in the restraints, her pink jump suit was causing her body to itch, she tried to scratch and satisfy every annoying distraction but she didn’t have much time. There was only 30 seconds left before the match would begin.

“Calm down, you’re going to be fine.” Adam’s voice soon radiated throughout her cockpit. Her frightened and pale eyes glimpsed to the side, Adam appeared on her communication screen, his lips curved as he smiled.

“I...I can’t do this...” She mumbled. She was horrified, never before had she had to rely on her own skills. She always had Adam, or Stephen even Mario to back her up in a pinch.

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“You’ll do fine. You’re a great MF pilot Heather. I believe in you. Now Miguel, he’s a good pilot, but he tends to rush in and expend his ammo all at once. He has no endurance, from what other pilots have told me about him he can only last about 15 minutes before his mental state breaks down. Blue Angel is equipped with some hard hitting weapons that can keep a good range between you and him. Keep that range, make him waste his ammo, those weapons of his are powerful but they’re low on ammo. Each grenade launcher has about 12 rounds, so that’s 24 rounds right there. The missile pods are about 50 each launcher, and he has 4 so that’s 200 missiles. You can do this, just keep a good distance.” Adam replied.

Heather nodded her head trying to keep it from shaking.

“How do you know all this?”

“I have my sources. Thank Mario later. Now you don’t have much time. Beat this guy so we can eat some lunch.” Adam replied smiling.

“I will...” Heather shut off the communications link, with a newfound confidence she grasped the throttles.

“So is she alright now?” Mario asked.

“Yeah she’s good now. She won’t lose this...by the way, how did you know about Miguel’s piloting strategies anyway?”

“Hehe...Michelle, she’s on Procella’s unit.”

“Hahaha...I see. Well it’ll be interesting to see what happens if Heather and Michelle have to face one another. I mean they’re the 3rd and 4th match in the tournament, so if they both win they’ll meet in the 2nd round.” Adam replied.

“Hehe, Heather’s my friend...but Michelle...”

“Taking a liking to her then I take it?” Adam asked as he nudged Mario in the gut. Mario smirked grabbing Adam in a headlock. His fist dug itself into Adam’s skull and began to rub excessively.

“Maybe..haha, you can’t escape bro!”

“Oh God man...let me go...Hey, I did you shower today bro?” Adam mumbled.

The tension in Heather’s eyes caused her to focus on Chaos. The heavily armored brown MF exploded out of its stationary position. Miguel was heading straight for Blue Angel with no second guesses. Without even thinking Heather quickly switched the attack mode to sniper, a small rectangular scope descended from the ceiling. As the crimson scope covered her eyes, a tiny green translucent box solidified around the core of Chaos. Her nerves lightened up, her finger then pulled the trigger inwards. The rail cannon on the back of her core flipped over as it gathered green energy around the tip of the barrel. Miguel ignored the massive cannon that was preparing to fire and unleashed his onslaught. Chaos’ arms jolted backwards as the intense grenade shell ruptured out from the barrel. Heather cringed as she watched the two shells flare towards her at tremendous speeds, since there was no gravity the normally heavy shells were twice as fast. Suddenly Blue Angel rocked as the massive thin beam of energy shot out from the rail gun. The intense beam of energy soared past the shells, the sheer velocity and heat of the beam caused the shells to explode instantly. Miguel freaked out as Chaos’ brown exterior lit up with shades of green as the beam neared. At the last second Chaos strafed to the right, the beam of energy ripped through the left arm causing an explosion to send Chaos tumbling through space as it sent off dozens of electrical sparks. The crowd lit up excitement, the loud roar of the spectators filled the dome. Heather knew the match wasn’t over; she just got lucky that her opponent was a berserker, one who rushes in without thinking. Her intelligence and experience with her team gave her a clear advantage.

Miguel sneered, he lost an arm but he wasn’t out of the fight; not this early. He cracked his knuckles followed by his neck, his feet then applied pressure to the accelerators forcing Chaos to recover and fly towards Blue Angel once again. He knew that the cannon required at least a minute to recharge in order to be fired again, so this was his chance. His display screen soon filled up with a dozen lock-on boxes, the rectangular launchers flipped open revealing the metallic silos. Heather quickly switched on

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her missile interceptors in preparation for the attack. The large rail cannon flipped back to hang over the back of her core. Blue Angel's right arm lifted as it extended her sniper rifle into space. She also raised the solid shield resting on her left arm for extra defense.

"A shield? Heh, stupid girl; that won't be enough." Miguel said. Suddenly dozens of missiles launched all flying at a curved angle towards their target.

"Damn..." Heather mumbled. Dozens of silver war heads spread across her display screen, they were everywhere. Finally her defenses started to kick in, a barrage of missiles violently erupted from her arm units in an attempt to negate Miguel's attack. She then stepped on the accelerator, Blue Angel's boosters flared and the blue and pink MF took off to create distance between her and her opponent.

"Heh, not good enough!" Miguel screamed; his finger retracted pressing another button. Just then each missile exploded sending out a wave of smoke. The crowd nearly jumped out of their seats cheering as they believed that Heather stopped Miguel's assault. Adam, Stephen and Mario just leaned against the pallid wall remaining quiet, things were not that simple. The crowd soon found that out as thousands of cerulean energy beans shot out from the torrent of smoke all heading for Blue Angel. The crowd simultaneously gasped for air in shock.

"ERMs...heh, I thought they were a prototype." Stephen smirked.

"Energy Rain Missiles huh? A nice trick, but I'm sure it won't work a second time." Adam replied.

Heather tried to maneuver but the energy beams were too fast. Blue Angel was then pelted by the energy beams. The constant attacks prevented the MF from moving thus giving Miguel the time he needed to move in for the kill. Chaos' boosters were flaring brightly as the MF dashed towards the bombarded Blue Angel. Once again he lifted the grenade launcher and fired. The massive shell tore through the rain of energy as it collided with Blue Angel's core. Heather screamed as she was tossed in the cockpit from the forceful blow. Shards of single metal floated in space from Blue Angel's core. The damage wasn't severe, but enough to send the MF's radiator into overdrive. Miguel began to chuckle, he felt the victory resting in the palm of his destructive hands.

"Hehe, so this is a pilot from Novus' team. I expected more." Miguel said sternly. Chaos continued to head towards Blue Angel in a straight line, Heather smiled as the rail cannon quickly flipped over as it fired a constant beam of energy. Since the beam was fired as the cannon was moving it created a straight beam of energy that was like a blade of an energy saber. Chaos already traveling at a high velocity couldn't stop in time, the green laser sliced through the left side of the MF. The beam just missed the cockpit but the force of the attack was so violent that it sent Miguel out of his seat, the restraints snapped in two. The protective face cover shattered as his head pierced the LCD screen in front of him. As the energy beam from the rail cannon dissipated Chaos floated lifeless as debris from its severe wound danced around. The right side of Chaos remained intact, the remaining booster continued to flicker beams of light but it had no more thrust. Miguel pushed himself out of the LCD screen as drops of blood fell staining the silver console. As he screamed in anguish he punched the console regardless of the pain it would cause.

Heather sat in Blue Angel's cockpit breathing heavily, her chest palpated as her anxiety consumed her. Her hands shook dizzily as they slowly moved off the throttles. The crowd once again jumped out of their seats in an uproar of applause. Adam smiled and patted Stephen's shoulder.

"I told you she'd win." Adam mentioned.

"Heh, that you did. She performed well." Stephen replied.

"Well guys, that means Michelle's up." Mario interrupted.

Both Adam and Stephen just glanced at Mario, their eyebrows arched in curiosity.

"So, about this Michelle..." Stephen began to talk.

Mario seemed like he was embarrassed, he never got embarrassed, he was always flamboyant and energetic, and to be shy about a single girl was uncharacteristic of him.

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“What? She’s just a fun person to be around that’s all...” Adam and Stephen glanced at each other and began to laugh. They slowly walked out of the dome each patting Mario briefly on the shoulder. He just stood there dumbfounded, his arms angled upwards and his palms flat while he shrugged his shoulders.

“Guys? Hey guys come on...what’s going on?!” Mario mumbled as he ran after the two brothers.

Blue Angel slowly re-entered the hanger as a crowd of people awaited her return. Most were just random people that she had never seen before, but here closet friends of late were there, Sharon and Ashley. The two of them smiled as they waved to Heather in an exaggerated fashion. Heather could do nothing but smile, the aura that her friends brought could lighten up any situation. As Blue Angel’s cockpit opened and Heather descended to the ground dozens of reporters ran confining her to a small circle with people as the ring. Dozens of obsidian microphones staggered in the air as her ears filled with gibberish for words. Reporters were like confused insects, all jumping around with no organization all screaming out words that could barely be put together to form a logical sentence. Ashley pushed her way through the crowd of reporters, she wasn’t afraid to get physical, her hands did the talking. As she finally managed to make it through the swamp of people she hugged Heather congratulating her on her victory.

“I told you! I knew you’d win!” Ashley screamed.

“I guess...I just got lucky haha.” Heather tried to brush off her victory as a fluke, she didn’t want to jynx herself so early on in the tournament. “Where’s Sharon?”

“Oh, she’s the quiet one. She said she’d wait for all the reporters to get out of here...” Just then one female reporter moved in between Heather and Ashley sticking up her microphone.

“Heather Pertencia, I’m Stephanie Star for GNT tell me how does it feel to be the first female advancing to the second round?”

“Umm..well...ummm” Heather continued to stumble over her words, not sure what to say. Abruptly Ashley took hold of the microphone and began to smirk.

“Well Stephanie, she is excited. She’s going to show all those men out there that women can kick just as much ass in an MF!” Ashley yelled.

Stephanie took back her microphone and turned back to the camera men.

“There you have it, Heather Pertencia one of the few women that are fighting an up hill battle in the Azure Cup. Will she win the whole thing? Only time will tell. We are now switching you guys to the last match of the first group in section ‘A’, Michelle Dolce versus Alex Altanero.”

Once again the dome was filled with eager spectators all awaiting the next match. Michelle Dolce sat in her cockpit determined to win. Her spirit was even more lifted when she heard that Heather had won the previous match. She wanted the chance to fight another female pilot, Michelle felt that MFs were dominated by male pilots and for the most part she was right. She didn’t want to just make it to the second round; she wanted to win the whole tournament. She felt that her MF was all she needed to make it happen; Red Dawn was a light weight MF with a high emphasis on speed. Michelle was infatuated with her pulse rifle; a pulse rifle was a newly developed weapon that fires rounds of energy pulses instead of rounds. The difference between a pulse round and an energy round is that pulses of energy are quick spurts of energy that do not put much strain on the generator. They also emanate a lot more heat than an energy round as fire quicker and on contact explode sending out hundreds of smaller energy particles that continue to sizzle on the target causing a dramatic heat increase. When she runs out of ammo for the pulse rifle she relies heavily on her dual mounted chain gun, the sound of bullets launching quickly from the barrel soothes her soul. Red Dawn’s left arm has an energy shield attached that can cover the majority of the core for increased defense. Not much was known about her opponent Alex other than he was from the EAP, more specifically Fenrir’s team. His MF was a behemoth of a machine, the joints of its legs were inverted, they were more stable than straight bipedal legs, and for his armament of weapons stability was needed. Three extra high-powered plasma rifles hung on the back of the core so when he runs out of

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ammo he can just equip another plasma rifle. In the left arm his MF carried a massive energy axe; it was another newly developed innovation from Genesis.

Michelle appeared shocked when her display screen lit up with Alex's grinning face. A thick gash ran diagonally across his forehead to his jaw line. His green eyes glistened, he appeared to be arrogant, and Michelle had no problem teaching arrogant people a lesson.

"So you're my opponent huh? I'll go easy on you cuz you're a girl, but don't expect me to let you win." He replied.

Her mouth twitched in succession with her eyebrows, her anger was building up. She tried to contain it but her fists were shaking along side of her seat. As she began to take deep breaths she finally managed to calm down.

"Alex right? Heh, nice MF, a bit slow isn't it?" She replied sarcastically.

He chuckled under his breath. "You mean my D-Block? Hahaha, who needs speed when you have power and defense? You can hit me all you like and you won't do any damage. But I invite you to try little girl." Alex replied as he abruptly shut off the communications link leaving Michelle staring at the blank screen in complete frustration.

"That little bastard..."

The match began and Michelle quickly boosted forward. Red Dawn flew in a circular pattern as D-Block constantly fired the plasma rifle. Each massive thick beam of searing energy surged past Red Dawn as the nimble MF avoided every attack. Alex sneered; she was quick, a lot quicker than any opponent he had ever faced. He realized that if he was going to have any shot at winning the match that he'd have to get within close range of her and strike her fragile MF down. Six boosters on D-Block opened up and fired sending the behemoth forward while Alex continued to fire blindly. The lock on box couldn't solidify Michelle was too quick. Red Dawn's pulse rifle began to fire, each fuchsia bubble of energy exploded on the massive core of D-Block, It was true that the MF had a tremendous amount of defense, but the added armor also made it a lot easier to hit. As each pulse came in contact with D-Block the heat inside the MF began to increase drastically. Flashing signs in crimson filled Alex's display screen all warning him off the dangerous increase in heat expenditure. Alex in a fit of rage hit the control panel which in turn shut off all the warnings.

"I hate that noise! Now come here you little pest!" D-Block flew towards Red Dawn as it sluggishly swung the energy axe. The thin beam of energy that flowed around the metallic blade sliced through the dual chain guns as Red Dawn moved out of the way. A small explosion took the chain guns off of Red Dawn. Michelle smiled as Red Dawn's knee suddenly struck the core of D-Block, the initial blow didn't cause any significant damage but it managed to move D-Block away a few feet. In that instant Red Dawn began to pummel the massive MF with pulse rounds, as each round collided with the armor the thickly armored MF began to emanate smoke. Sweat poured out from Alex's skin, his jumpsuit became sticky and abrasive to his skin. As he ignored the irritations and the apparent increase in heat his hands pushed the throttles forcing D-Block to swing the energy axe one more time. As the axe descended Michelle ignited the energy shield, a massive flat like shield soon emanated around the left arm deflecting the blow. Alex's eyes twitched, he stepped onto the accelerators with all his strength but was greeted only with a loud squeaking sound. The six boosters slowly shut off leaving D-Block motionless in the space. Michelle then pulled the throttles inwards causing Red Dawn to punch D-Block in the head unit. The ferocity of the punch sent D-Block's head flying off the MF's core.

Mario nearly burst out in excitement over Michelle's victory. Adam and Stephen remained smiling as they watched their friend indulge in Michelle's victory.

"Looks like Heather has a difficult opponent in the next round." Stephen mumbled to Adam.

"Yeah, but something tells me she can handle it." Adam replied.

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The first day finally came to an end as ‘A-2’ finished its last first round match, with a relatively new pilot, Solice taking a victory over a high ranking EAP pilot Vagrant. Television screens all over Prosperity as well as Earth and military camps on Mars lit up with the radiant reporter from GNT.

“This is Stephanie Star once again reporting from the Prosperity Space Station. The first section has just completed their 1st round and what an opening day it was. We saw exciting matches filled with emotions like, suspension, shock, fear, and anxiety, God only knows what to expect when Section ‘B’ begins their first round tomorrow morning. Here are the current standings for the tournament so far!” Suddenly a translucent ivory list appeared on the screen leaving Stephanie in the background.

A-1

Zach

Zach

Reine

Leo

Leo

Severen

Heather

Heather

Miguel

Michelle

Michelle

Alex

A-2

Fenrir

Chris

Chris

Caleb

Caleb

Josh

Ryan

Ryan

Jason

Vagrant

Solice

Solice

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“I am Stephanie Star and I hope you enjoyed the first day of the Azure Cup Tournament. Tune in tomorrow for what appears to be one of the best matches in the first round. Mario Liberalis takes on the EAP’s own, Fafner.” As his voice began to fade so did the broadcast.

The first day had come to a conclusion, winners celebrated while the losers soaked and debated if they wanted to stay and watch the rest of the tournament. Adam, Stephen, Mario, Sharon, Ashley, Heather and Michelle all went out for their own celebration dinner. They had invited Zach but he was still in shock over what had happened to Reine. All of them took this as an opportunity to dress up and take a break from the informality that they had been accustomed to. This was a chance to take a break.

As they sat comfortably at their dinner table Adam smiled, he rose his glass to salute the two winners at the table, Heather and Michelle.

“Congratulations you two, this is for you. May you make it to the third round.” Adam mentioned.

Stephen then looked at his brother awkwardly. “Umm we already know one of them will make it, they are going against each other in the 2nd round.” Stephen replied.

“Oh yeah...haha, guess I forgot. Well then good luck to both of you.” Adam said as he refined his toast.

Everyone at the table rose their glass to the toast. Sharon then turned around placing her hand on Adam’s shoulder. He turned around to look at her and instantly his eyes were in amazement. She was radiant in her silk dark blue gown; the color of the gown accentuated her tan skin, and her deep brown eyes. He smirked as she took a sip of her ice filled glass of cola.

“So I guess you like ice now huh. You’re such a hypocrite.” Adam mumbled.

Sharon just glared at Adam and shrugged her shoulders like it wasn’t a big deal.

“Its ice, who cares? But more importantly when do you fight?” She brought up a good question, Adam has been stuck watching matches and he still had a good amount of time before his own match came to rotation.

“Eh, I’m stuck in Section ‘E-1’ so I have a few days. Its okay I guess, because this way I get a chance to scout the competition.” Adam replied.

“Hahaha, right. Try and make it to the second round, I would hate to have outlasted you.” Heather replied in a snug expression.

“Hahaha, I wouldn’t worry about that Heather. Just concern yourself with your own battles.” Adam replied.

The group continued to laugh throughout the remainder of the night, they were friends, and nothing would get in the way of that.

Luscious smiled while Severen sat engulfed in his failure.

“You never were an MF pilot so I don’t know why you expected to beat Leo Ombra.” Luscious mentioned.

“My brother and I are twins; we’re supposed to excel in the same areas! I’m tired of being the one who sits here and does nothing. You control Genesis, and Caleb is out there fighting!” Severen screamed.

“That is not always the case. Besides Leo is a professional. He’s done great work for us in the past you know.” Luscious replied.

“Big deal, he managed to secure the 2nd Chimera pilot. That wasn’t too hard.”

“No, but it did his job with the utmost care. But he isn’t our concern. He’s in this tournament for his own accord.”

“Heh, he probably wants to find his lost memories.” Severen interrupted.

“I guess that’s possible. I find it amusing how most people try and find their memories in the cockpit of a machine.”

“Well they were MF pilots before you stole their memories Luscious. Its only natural for them to go back.”

“I guess that makes sense. I heard that the war is beginning to escalate Severen.”

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“Yeah, both the TA and the EAP are on the verge of using nuclear weapons. Their frustrations have blinded them.”

“We’re nearing the designated time Severen. It won’t be long now.”

“About that Luscious. I received a report about the clones...”

“The clones? What about them?”

“The scientists are saying that the Beta-versions, the ones that have already been integrated into society have a problem. Their organs have a tendency to emanate a lot of heat, more heat than the human body is equipped to handle. If the clone takes on too much stress it is possible that it will suffer what they refer to as a heat attack. One of these attacks isn’t much to be concerned with, but if they keep up then it is a sign of decomposition and it won’t be long until the clone completely dissolves.” Severen announced.

“I see...well then we better get moving fast. How about the new batch, Alpha, do they share this same defect?”

“No, Alpha is fine.”

“Well that’s a relief then. Here’s to the rebirth of a better sin-free world.” Luscious said as he rose his wine glass into the air.

Chapter Eleven: Mario's Turn

The second day of the Azure Cup had come and Mario was lucky enough to grab the first match of the day. His opponent was Fafner, an EAP general that he had beaten before on the battlefield. Knowing this he had little concern about the match itself, he was sure he was going to win. As he slept inside Anima's cockpit Michelle stared at him while placing a cloth blanket over his motionless body. They had been on Prosperity for about a month and in that month they had both come to know each other well. Ever since the day that Mario went up against Rebel358 in an attempt to impress Michelle with his moves she had been fond of him and him of her. His eyes began to shiver, he slowly woke up, his vision blurred at first but eventually cleared up; Michelle smiled staring down at him.

"Good morning." Michelle mentioned. Mario smiled at the sound of her voice.

"Hey..." He then looked around taking notice of the blanket that now covered his body.

"Thanks."

"You for someone who believes that this match is going to be a joke you've been spending a lot of time in your cockpit."

"Heh, it's not Fafner I'm worried about. He's a predictable pilot. He fights with dual energy sabers, and two energy cannons that fold under the joints that connect the arms to the core. He'll spend the majority of the fight flying around while firing the cannon as a distraction in an attempt to get close to land a blow with the energy saber. Anima is too fast for his MF, Arcadia. I'm just not too sure if there's a point to this tournament...I mean that guy, Rebel what's his name is the most skilled pilot I've ever seen. I'm not sure if anyone is going to beat him." Mario replied.

"Come on, he can't be that good. You're making him sound invincible, he's only human." Michelle replied.

"I'm not so sure...I've never seen anyone handle an MF quite like him before...he's the only one that ever pushed me to the brink of fear..."

"So what are you suggesting? That you give up? That we all just give up and let this guy take the tournament?"

Mario wanted to say yes, but he knew that would only infuriate her. The fact of the matter was that he was afraid of Rebel358, and knew he could never beat him. In his eyes the tournament has already completed its goal, to find the strongest MF pilot. Rebel358 was the strongest pilot, he beat Adam without a sweat or much effort for that matter, the tournament was just a game now.

"Just take it one match at a time. When it gets to Rebel then worry about him, until then fight the fight. Now, don't you have a match?"

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Mario nodded, he did have a match. He smiled as Michelle hugged him tightly while taking back the blanket. As the two began to separate their eyes became stuck in an endless display of affection. Their heads moving closer at a 45 degree angle, their eyes closing as they allowed themselves the pleasure of their embrace. Just as their lips began to caress a loud ringing sound blared forth signaling the green light for launch. Mario sneered under his breath as Michelle gave him a quick kiss for good luck and then pushed herself away from Anima's cockpit. She slowly floated back to the hanger floor as Mario closed the cockpit and prepared for launch.

"Heh...maybe things will be alright for once. Mario Liberalis. Anima launching!" The boosters flickered as the ivory MF launched out of the hanger heading towards space. As Michelle fluttered down she smiled, she had a feeling that everything was going to work out for the best.

"So he's fighting Fafner again huh?" Adam asked as he threw a bottle of orange juice at his brother who reclined on his bed. As Stephen caught the bottle he chuckled.

"Yeah, I found it funny when I first found out. I mean Mario beat Fafner pretty bad on Mars so I kind of figure that this match shouldn't take too much time. Although I do kind of feel bad for not going to the dome to watch the match." Stephen replied as his fingers split opened the top of bottle.

"Well I'm kind of tired; I mean we did stay out pretty late last night. Besides we can watch the match here in the comfort of my room...which reminds me, why are you in my room anyway?" Adam asked as he turned looking back at his brother.

Stephen began to laugh as he moved upwards off the bed. The room was a decent size for a two-bed room, a 30 inch flat panel screen was lodged on top of a wooden dresser, it was oak with a slight tan hue. The windows were off to the right side of the room with ivory drapes. The drapes themselves were silk, not something Adam was particularly fond of but Sharon seemed to like them. She said it gave the room a sense of eloquence, he didn't care, and he just used the room for sleep anyways.

"Well Ashley is having a girls meeting in our room and I was kicked out." Stephen replied as he took a sip of his orange juice. He didn't even bother to look at his brother, his eyes just wandered around the pallid room that they were in. Adam who was lying comfortably on the bed, with his head resting underneath one of the ivory pillows suddenly jumped up causing the pillow to fling against the wall. Stephen chuckled under his breath.

"Whoa...wait a minute. I thought Ashley had her own room. I didn't know you two were sharing! When did this happen?"

"Well she was supposed to have her own room, but the computer screwed up and there wasn't a room available so I got stuck with her." Stephen replied.

Adam began to snicker, he knew that Ashley was taking a liking to his brother, he just wasn't completely sure.

"Hehe, so tell me then. What do you think of her?" Stephen sighed as his brother mentioned this. He knew it was inevitable, the question that his brother posed. He responded in the only way he knew how.

"She's a nice person." He mumbled, he then began to spread cream cheese onto his slightly burned toast. Adam knew what he was doing, he was trying to get off the subject, but Adam refused to let that go.

"She's nice, right...you like her. I could tell that you liked her ever since that night at the club." Adam replied.

"I like her, like I said she's a nice person, a good friend."

"A friend right...well then, we've been here for about a month now and you two have been living in the same room for that long. I think it's pretty clear that something has had to happen by now." Adam replied.

Stephen paused for a moment, long enough to take a bite out of his toast.

"Whatever we've done is none of your business." Stephen mildly replied.

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“Oh my God! You did...you had sex with her!” Adam screamed out as his body rolled back into the bed in a fit of laughter. As his brother mocked him Stephen continued to eat his toast. He then took hold of the remote control and turned on the TV.

“How come you didn’t tell me? Wow, we’re brothers; you’re supposed to tell me everything.”

“I’m not inclined to feed you every detail of my personal life. Do I ask you about you and Sharon? I could say the same thing. You two have been living here for a month now.”

“Hahaha, that may be true, but we’re in a relationship. You just met Ashley a little over 6 weeks ago.” Adam replied.

“I never once said I had sex with her. Look, the match has already started.” Stephen replied.

Adam continued to be amused by the topic of conversation. It had been a long time since he was able to joke and just enjoy himself, not with all of the deception surrounding Genesis and the war. He didn’t forget, but he figured if he was going to find out anything that he should try and enjoy his youth while he had it. He decided to drop the subject; Stephen obviously didn’t want to talk about it. Stephen had always been mysterious when it came to his relationships, when he dated Veronica only a selective few were aware. Then when they broke up suddenly she left her job as OM. Adam always thought about that in the back of his mind, he couldn’t understand why Stephen never really got close with the opposite sex, he always thought that Stephen was so focused on his agenda that he was afraid he might lose his lover in some traumatic way, that was the only explanation Adam could come up with. But he watched the way Ashley and Stephen interacted, they got along well and they had the same sense of humor, they were a good match. Adam’s eyes managed to wander back to the screen as Anima dashed through space following Fafner.

“Heh, looks like Mario already has the upper hand.” Adam mumbled.

Anima boosted around the energy beams that Fafner sent out. The nimble MF made everything look extremely easy, as Mario closed in on Fafner’s MF the two energy whips abruptly shot out. Arcadia’s energy sabers ignited as the yellow MF began to swing in an attempt to slice the energy whips in two. As Arcadia continued to swing blindly through space Anima’s positron cannon quickly detached from the back and began to float in space. The right arm of Anima swung forward; the energy whip smacked the left side of Arcadia sending a torrent of electricity through the yellow MF. Smoke began to smolder out from the control console in Arcadia’s cockpit, Fafner began to curse loudly as he waved his hands to get rid of the smoke. Suddenly the energy whip wrapped around Arcadia’s right arm limiting its movements.

“MARIO!” Fafner screamed as the two energy cannons pivoted and fired. As Mario sighed from the predictable moves that Fafner was displaying Anima’s left arm grabbed hold of the positron cannon that lingered. Arcadia quickly reacted by slicing through the energy whip with the energy saber in the right arm. Just then the massive cannon fired an elongated beam of positron energy that tore through the right arm of Arcadia. The intensity of the blast sent Arcadia spiraling out of control. Anima once again let go of the positron cannon and sped towards Fafner. Fafner struggled with the controls inside Arcadia while Mario continued to close in on the falling MF. Mario shrugged his shoulders while grabbing onto one of the energy sabers. As the beam of energy ignited the energy whip on the left arm flung through space and wrapped around both of Arcadia’s leg units. Just then Arcadia stopped falling out of control as Anima’s energy whip began to retract and like a fishing rod reeled Arcadia in. As the yellow MF squirmed like a defenseless fish Anima sliced through the lower half of Arcadia’s torso. Adam and Stephen continued to laugh at the pathetic antics of Fafner, they knew that Mario was just toying with him but they still enjoyed the show. Mario was like that, if he has a choice between entertaining and ending the battle quickly he’ll entertain. The match was clearly over as Arcadia floated in space surrounded by a debris belt of its own armor while Anima lingered above with its metallic arms folded across its chest.

“Well so far our entire camp has moved onto the 2nd round.” Adam mentioned.

“Yep, except for Reine.” Stephen replied.

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“Yeah, well that doesn’t count because he was fighting Zach and Zach is part of our camp now.” Adam replied.

“Wouldn’t it be funny if we both lost in the first round?” Stephen brought up jokingly.

The two glanced at one another and began to crack up. “Right...hahaha, us, lose in the first round. Please, we’re at least making it to the second round.” Adam replied as spurts of laughter crept out of his lips.

The day passed by quickly and before everyone knew it Section ‘B’ had finished their round. Aside from Mario, there was no other pilot that Adam nor did Stephen feel any desire to watch. The three pilots stood staring at the massive screen in the lounge where the results for the day were being posted. Adam’s anxiety continued to build up because with each passing hour he was that much closer to competing.

“You did good Mario.” Stephen mentioned.

“Yeah, I did ok. But Fafner wasn’t much of a challenge.”

“That may be true but you put on a show that much is for sure. I have to be honest I really liked that maneuver when you reeled him in just to cut off Arcadia’s legs, that was priceless.” Adam said still laughing from the permanent image that was embedded into his memory.

“So then, are you looking for tomorrow’s matches?” Mario questioned.

Both Adam and Stephen remained quiet.

“What? What happened?”

“Tomorrow the first round for Section ‘C’...” Stephen began to mention.

“Yeah, ‘C’ and then ‘D’ the next and ‘E’ after that, what’s the big deal?” Mario asked.

“Rebel358 leads off tomorrow’s matches.” Adam mumbled.

It then hit Mario, tomorrow Rebel would start his journey towards victory, the fun and games would end and the tone of the tournament would become cold.

Adam slowly turned back to the screen, his head tilted upwards so he could see the results from Section ‘B’.

‘B-1’

Mario

Mario

Fafner

Pennance

Pennance

Repentence

Kyle

Phantom

Phantom

Mark

Mark

Thomas

‘B-2’

Anya

Cherrybomb

Cherrybomb

David

Nex

Nex

Splendor

Carlos

Carlos

Elaine

X

X

There it was spelled out, the winners of Section ‘B’, those who were fortunate enough to proceed to the second round of the Azure Cup tournament.

“Looks like you’re fighting Penance Mario.” Stephen mentioned.

“Yeah...”

“It won’t be as easy as Fafner. You know that right Mario?” Stephen asked.

“Yeah...I know...” Mario mumbled

“The Silent Assassin for the EAP” Adam interrupted.

“Yeah...” Mario said as he glanced to the side. The Earth was in plain sight now, its radiant turquoise aura lit up the solitude and darkness of space. It was calming; it was hard to believe that it was filled with such violence and chaos.

Rebel358 stood staring into the void that was space. His crimson tinted eyes piercing through the cerulean orb known as Earth. His hands pressed firmly onto the frigid pane glass in the tunnel connecting the two sections of Prosperity. His ears then twitched at the sound of shoes touching the ground in a rhythmic fashion. Rebel358 paid this person no attention and continued to gaze into the serenity that was Earth.

“Everyone thinks you’re going to win the Azure Cup.”

Rebel smirked; he pushed his body away from the glass in order to properly greet Caleb who was now leaning against the other side of the tunnel.

“Everyone speculates.” Rebel replied.

“That may be true, but you are not going to win the tournament.” Caleb replied.

“Ooh and I suppose destiny reserved that pleasure for you then.” His sarcasm was hurtful, it wasn’t even the bitter reply; it was how calm Rebel appeared when he said it. Like Caleb was nothing of concern.

“That’s right. I am the one who is going to be the victor. I get my shot at Novus, no one else, especially not a failure like you!” Caleb screamed, he soon found himself holding the collar of Rebel’s obsidian leather jacket. His fingers dug deeply into the fabric as his forehead pressed against Rebel’s. Rebel mere chuckled under his breath, his crimson pupils burrowed into Caleb’s very essence, his soul. He needed to say nothing, a sharp chill suddenly over ran Caleb’s body, he began to quiver with fear; his fingers loosened their grip and eventually let go of the jacket. Rebel fixed his wrinkled collar and began to walk away leaving Caleb leaning against the wall. As Caleb began to breathe inconsistently his body slid to the floor in a state of panic.

“And for the record Caleb, I sincerely hope that you are truly prepared for what’s to come.” Rebel said as his body was engulfed in the shadows that brimmed throughout the tunnel.

Chapter Twelve: Shadows

Adam's eyes rolled open, the ceiling was cracked and misshapen, and that was one of his first thoughts upon waking up. His pupils shortened in width as a bright light flickered in the room. He knew he had to get up; he needed to watch the one match of the day that was on every pilot's mind, Rebel358. The pilot has created a following of pilots, they either love him or fear him, his swagger, no pilot has seen a pilot who held onto such skill and remained as calm as he did. He had an eerie presence, something was unique about him but no one could put their finger on it. His MF Shadow wasn't anything special, but the way he handled it, the way he used its speed and weaponry was unparalleled. As Adam rolled over swatting the alarm clock that blinked the digits, 6:30 Sharon stood staring. Her delicate hands grazed his cheek only to feel the heat that was emanating from within his body. He was burning up, his body tried to remedy this by sweating but to no avail. She jumped back in shock, she couldn't understand what had happened; he seemed perfectly healthy the night before.

"Adam you're burning up!" Sharon blurted out. Adam shrugged it off and slowly stood up from the bed. The ivory sheets tumbled off his body as he stumbled to the ground. His dark brown hair swayed in the hair dripping with sweat, he tried to smile but his muscles were numb. As his feet began to move forward he felt his legs became numb and he collapsed towards Sharon's bed. She wanted to catch him but she knew she couldn't catch him, her arms quickly reached out for him as his chin bounced off the edge of her mattress. He rested on the rugged carpet breathing heavily.

"ADAM!" She screamed, her knees fell to the ground as she placed her arms around his chest. He was still steaming with heat and sweat, he sighed.

"I need to get going." He mumbled under his faint breath as his arms tried to rise. As his body moved upwards Sharon tried to guide him with her arms on his chest and his back.

"You're not going anywhere, not in this condition."

"I'm fine... (no... no I'm not fine... what's going on with me? I can barely move, is it because I'm scared? Am I scared of this Rebel?)" The fact was that ever since his practice bout against Rebel358 the MF, Shadow haunted his dreams, more so than Chimera ever did. He knew there was something special with Rebel and his MF but he couldn't figure out what it was. A smile slowly managed to gleam across his face as Sharon returned with a glass of cold water.

"Thanks..." He managed to mutter as he took a massive gulp. Sharon then reclined on the floor leaning against her mattress. Her arms rest over her elevated knees, while her mahogany hair flowed over her alluring face.

"You can't be sick; if you were then it wouldn't just happen out of no where like this. You're stressing out over something....care to talk about it?"

Adam just glared back, he knew what she was trying to do and he did appreciate it. But this wasn't something he wanted to discuss; he didn't want her to know that he was scared. He managed to stagger up from the poorly designed carpet. Sharon's eyes followed his movements as he stood up.

"I have to get going. The first match starts in 5 minutes. I can't afford to miss it. I have my phone, I'll call you once it's done and we'll get lunch at the food court." Adam said as he zipped up his denims.

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“Adam...”

“I’ll be fine. Don’t worry...sorry I really need to get going.” Adam said one final time as he ran over kissing her on the forehead and then headed out the door. She just loomed on the carpet with her head hidden under her arms while leaning forward.

Nearly every man, woman and child woke up early in order to watch the live feed of the first match of Section ‘C’. A young attractive woman stood cheerfully in front of the dome in Prosperity, her charcoal long hair flapped through the brisk air conditioned wind. Her right hand covering her ear so she could hear the information being fed to her from the speaker, she then nodded, it was time.

“Hi and welcome back to the live television feed of the Azure Cup Tournament brought to you by GNT. I am Stephanie Star and I have to tell you this first match of the Section ‘C’ first round has been surrounded in the most buzz so far. Pilots all over have been saying that this pilot, Rebel358 is going to be the one to take the tournament. So it’s only natural for every pilot registered to be here to watch his phenomenal man pilot his MF, Shadow. I got the chance earlier this morning to talk with his opponent, Crimson and he is shaken up. He is one of the pilots who feel strongly about Rebel’s skills and wish that he didn’t have to face him in the first round. So stay tuned, the first match of Section ‘C’ is underway!” As her voice left the audio it was replaced by a humming sound that excreted from the boosters on both MFs. Crimson’s MF was the first to be seen, it was a mid-weight red and purple MF wielding a machine gun and an energy trident while its secondary weapons was a quadruple cannon resting on its back. Shadow lingered on the opposite side holding onto its plasma rifle and energy saber, Rebel358 remained calmly strapped into his seat awaiting the green light.

Crimson’s body was quivering at an unbelievable rate, his hands couldn’t remain on the throttles; they would just slide off the side. He tried to calm himself down, his right hand slapped down hard onto the left but his body was still trembling. His helmet was engulfed in dense fog created from the repetitive open-mouthed breathing.

“...*huff* what’s happening *huff* to me *huff*...I can’t control... *huff* myself... *huff* *huff*...wait a minute...I need more*huff*...” Crimson glanced to the side of his control panel and grabbed a syringe that was wrapped in a protective covering. He elongated needle tossed in his sweat ridden hands, after a few seconds he finally managed to get a steady grip.

“Finally... *huff*...” He ripped the sealing off the needle and without second guessing his actions, stuck the needle into a vein palpitating in his forearm. As the liquid slowly flowed into his circulatory system, his breathing became stabilized and his body slowly calmed down. For a brief second everything was quiet, but then his body jerked abruptly, his muscles began to tighten and his heart race. As his body became accustomed to the steroid his pupils dissolved leaving nothing more than a translucent brown gradient. His hands wrapped around the throttles tightly, his feet flexed preparing to hit the accelerators. Then it happened, the moment everyone had been waiting for...

READY?! GO!

Crimson pounded onto the accelerator, the massive outburst of energy exploded sending his MF, Abolition into the depth of space. Rebel glanced to the right not even bothering to pay attention to the rampaging MF that was closing in on him. Just as Abolition appeared in front of Shadow Crimson jerked the controls sending his MF to the right side, he was trying to get around Shadow in order to strike it from behind. The energy trident flared with an intense flame of lime energy. The left arm of Abolition quickly swung down guiding the trident to hit Shadow’s left arm. All of a sudden there was silence, the crowd standing at attention refused to blink; their mouths gaping wide. In a blink of an eye Shadow appeared behind Abolition with the crimson MF’s left arm planted into the energy blade. No one bothered to look at the severely damaged Abolition; they just say Shadow in its glory raising the energy saber up high with his opponent’s limb dangling from the tip of the blade.

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Adam's fist clutched to the side of his torso quivering, whether it was in fear or frustration he didn't even know. He stood in the middle of the stairs leading to the bottom of the dome where the massive LCD stood. He soon felt a hand touch his back.

"Having second thoughts?" Stephen asked.

"I...I don't know."

"He's going to be in the finals you know that. If you intend on winning this you're going to need to be able to conquer him."

"I don't care about the tournament Stephen. I want to know what the hell Genesis is doing."

Adam replied.

"I know...but I know you. And I know you want to be the one to defeat that pilot." Stephen replied.

Adam was about to reply but Shadow once again demanded his attention. A quick flash of light streaked across the arena and that was it; the match was over. Abolition burst out into a dozen of pieces, the cockpit floated in space surrounded by perfectly cut limbs of his MF. The incisions were precise, that was amazing by itself, but the speed at which they were done was what made it simply breath-taking. In no more than 20 seconds Rebel358 advanced to the second round. Adam had hoped for a chance to analyze Rebel's fighting tactics some more, but Crimson didn't help by blindly rushing in giving Rebel even more of an advantage. He sneered quietly and walked out of the dome leaving Stephen standing in the midst of an overwhelmed crowd.

"Damn it Adam..."

Tons of reporters waited for Rebel358 to arrive back in the hanger. His performance was impressive, not one person was able to follow his movements; he was a sure win for the tournament. As Shadow floated safely back into the hanger he reclined back into his chair, his arms firmly tucked under his armpits.

"The game has begun...I've made my move Novus...what is your counter?" He said to himself as his eyelids became heavy and shut tightly sealing him in a world of utter darkness. He was sealed, hidden beneath the shadows of his existence.

The matches following Rebel's didn't stand a chance. No other pilot had any significant chance at capturing the crowd in the way that Rebel did. They were mediocre and riddled down with simplistic tactics and conservative piloting. No one cared though, people were just happy the first round was winding down, everyone waited for the next chance to see Rebel in action once again. Adam remained secluded from his friends for the following 2 days, no one knew where exactly he went, but they figured after seeing Rebel's performance that he needed time alone, to think, and to plan. The 'C' Section and the 'D' section came to a close at the end of the day. The pilots who were lucky enough to move ahead were announced while the war at home continued to drag.

'C-1'

Rebel358

Rebel358

Crimson

Dyne

Solar

Solar

Flux
 Flux
Marcus

Tim
 Colin
Colin

‘C-2’

Shawn
 Vincent
Vincent

Snake
 Snake
Leon

Templar
 Rogue
Rogue

Jose
 Jose
Francis

‘D-1’

Masked
 Ruby
Ruby

Jack X
 Death
Death

Desire
 Archangel
Archangel

Famine
 Pestilence
Pestilence

‘D-2’

Pride
 Pride
Sydney

Shane

Diablos

Diablos

Sapphire

Greed

Greed

Envy

Envy

Anima

The next day called for the first round of Section 'E', Adam was the first match of the day. His opponent Wrath was another one of the "unknowns" in the tournament, he was neither from the TA or the EAP, just another pilot who showed up to participate in the tournament. No one knew what to expect from Adam when he would go out into space for his match. But they knew it would probably be a way for him to find the answers he had been so desperately searching for these past weeks.

Sharon carefully entered the dismal place that was known to most as the MF hanger. She wasn't sure what she hoped to find, maybe it was Adam, maybe it was nothing. Her hair suddenly began to flap wildly as the hanger wall opened allowing a blue MF to reenter Prosperity. Her lips began to thin as she smiled; it was Adam. Adam noticed Sharon standing at the edge of the concrete hanger, he sighed he knew what she wanted. He had avoided his friends for about 2 days now, even though he knew it wasn't with malicious intent, they didn't know. As Blue Dragon docked into place the gravity generator was disabled and Sharon quickly jumped into the air heading towards his cockpit. As the cockpit opened Adam's eyes widened at the abrupt appearance of Sharon floating in front of him.

"Hey..." He mumbled.

"Hey." She replied. They were short and sharp their responses. They knew they each had a lot on their minds and didn't want to sound especially rude at the wrong time.

"Are you ok? I mean everyone has been worried about you." Sharon said. Her tone of voice changed, she was determined and confident in her words.

"I'm fine, I just needed to get away from everything for awhile...you know just sit and think."

"You're scared of that Rebel guy aren't you?"

Adam wasn't the least bit shocked that she was able to figure that out. She did know him better than most.

"I was..." Adam replied.

"You were? What happened? Why are you now not intimidated?"

"Because....because I know you're here with me."

Chapter Thirteen: The Wings of Space

Adam sat in his cockpit already strapped behind the restraints. He knew his match was the first of Section 'E' but he could care less. He was just happy that he was finally getting the chance to go out there and fight. He had been heading out into space for the past few days going on test runs with Blue Dragon. He was comfortable with the OS and how it handled, he knew he was ready, but was still lacking full confidence when it came to Rebel358. After Rebel's match he knew it would be hard to make an impact on the tournament in the eyes of the pilots and other spectators. Even though he wasn't fighting against Rebel he knew he had to give the people a show, possibly even give them a glimpse at what he felt would be the key at defeating Rebel; that would only be a reality if he could master it in time.

Stephen and Mario were already at the dome waiting for the start of the match, the girls preferred to stay in their room and watch it together, they didn't like heading out to the dome to stand alongside a group of sweaty men that they didn't know.

"So what do you know about Adam's opponent?" Mario asked.

"Not much. I know his MF is called Fury; it's completely reliant on its right arm rocket launcher. The shells from the launcher cause a high amount of damage if they connect, but he also is equipped with energy boomerangs as well for back up and a few missile packs." Stephen replied.

"Hmm, I see. Anything you think Adam might have trouble with?" Mario asked.

"Normally I would say no. But this Rebel guy really has him worked up, so I'm not sure where his head is right now." Stephen replied.

Suddenly the massive LCD lit up as the two opposing MFs entered their arena.

"Well here we go. This should be interesting." Stephen mumbled to himself.

"Hi, and once again I'm Stephanie Star bringing you full coverage of the first round. And once again we have what should make out to be one exciting match. Adam Novus, otherwise known as the Azure Knight has finally made his appearance in the tournament, and with the entire buzz for Rebel358 it should be interesting to see how he responds in his opening match against the mysterious pilot, Wrath."

Rebel358 stood behind the mass of people grinning as he lit his cigarette. As the brooding smoke lingered in the air from his stick he began to smile even more.

"Well then, let's see what you can do."

Adam stared at the MF floating before him; he wasn't too concerned he knew what he had to do. If he was going to make a name for himself in the tournament then he needed to go hard. As the seconds continued to pass by his fingers only tightened even more around the throttles.

READY GO!!!

Wrath wasted little time, Fury dashed towards Blue Dragon launching an onslaught of heavily armored rockets. The silver rockets pierced through minuet rocks causing them to burst apart in several directions. Adam's eyes calmly opened as he lightly tapped the accelerators, the cerulean flames of energy flared out from the 2 sets of boosters. The azure wings lifted up at an angle as they prepared to launch. Wrath's eyes widened as he watched Blue Dragon zoom past the rockets, and as the blue MF soared the rockets exploded into pieces by the sheer velocity of the MF. Wrath almost became completely paralyzed in his cockpit but managed to wake from his trance. Fury quickly grabbed onto the two energy boomerangs and with little haste threw the two weapons. As the weapons moved along a curved trajectory Blue Dragon docked its laser rifles taking hold of its energy sabers. Just as the boomerangs descended towards the blue MF Adam sliced the weapons in two with ease. Fury flew through the clusters of smoke

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that was created from the destruction of its weapons, at point blank ranged Wrath fired the rockets only to miss. Blue Dragon's thrusters ignited sending it even higher above Fury. Then it happened, what everyone waited to see, the 8 azure wings abruptly extended outwards while a crisp cerulean glow outlined each wing as they promptly separated into space. The orbital wings instantly locked onto Fury's position and began to pound heavily onto the MF. Dozens of cerulean beams bombarded Fury, there was no place to run it was only a matter of time before the MF fell. The beams pierced the metallic armor severing the joints that held the limbs together.

Stephen and Mario smiled as they walked out of the dome. They already knew who the victor of the match was.

"Told you." Mario mumbled.

"I guess he just needed to get in the cockpit." Stephen replied.

As they walked out Rebel358 chuckled under his breath while clapping his hands together.

"That's what I was hoping to see...now the game has truly begun."

The orbital wings quickly reattached to the wing set as Blue Dragon eloquently descended over the mutilated Fury. Wrath was frozen in his cockpit, his hands trembling over the throttles; he did not expect this outcome for his match. Adam sighed as the Angel system disengaged. The match was over and he advanced to the second round. His head reclined backwards as he closed his eyes while he was showered with the radiant beams that emanated from the sun in the distance. His soul felt at peace once again, as his MF floated peacefully in space with the wings outstretched in the distance he felt Sharon's soothing hands caressing his face while muttering the words "I'm proud of you."

"Yeah, I'm going to be alright." He mumbled out loud.

While Blue Dragon slowly moved back towards the hanger the next two MF dashed out to begin their match. Adam couldn't help but smile as he realized for the first time since being on Prosperity that here every pilot respected one another, there were no ties or allegiances to their military factions. He liked the feeling, it was like a Utopia. Sharon waved extravagantly as Blue Dragon docked into position. Even as the massive MF was still in motion she jumped to be taken by the gravitation-less environment, she couldn't wait for Adam to get out of the cockpit. She wanted to be the first to greet him; she was going to make those reporters wait. Adam once he saw Sharon immediately opened the cockpit and extended his arms. His body leaned out from the cockpit taking hold of her body, the two hugged floated out in the middle of the room spinning in the air. Her chin rested against his shoulder while she fought against the tears that were trying to make their way out.

"I'm so proud of you..." She mumbled.

"I know...I couldn't have made it without you. Because of you I know what I'm fighting for. This Rebel...he won't get in my way." He replied.

"I'm glad..." The two remained embraced for another five minutes just floating in the air while the dozens of reporters just watched in awe.

Stephen smirked and patted Mario on the shoulder.

"We'll talk with him later." Stephen mentioned.

"Yeah...guess we should give him his space for a while then. You two coming?" Mario asked as he looked over to Ashley and Heather.

"Yeah, I guess we can meet up with him later." Ashley replied.

Luscious smiled as he read the results from Section 'E's first round.

"I told you he'd advance." Luscious mumbled softly.

"Good, I'm happy he did. I want my shot."

"Caleb settle down. You know you have a lot of other pilots to go through before you can get your shot at Adam."

"I know....but still."

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“Deal with him later, has the computer finished analyzing the pilot data collected from the pilots that have fought yet?” Luscious asked.

Caleb began to smirk. “Yeah they have. And they’ve already been sent back to HQ. We’re way ahead of schedule Luscious.”

“Good....”

“About the failure Luscious.” Caleb said.

Luscious then placed his glass of wine on the small coffee table in front of his legs.

“What about him?”

“I’m not sure...but I think he’s developing a purpose of his own...I think it’d be best to cut our loses now before he gets out of control.”

“I see...is that it Caleb?”

“Umm...yeah...but Luscious.”

“Don’t worry about him; I’ll take care of him.”

“Hi again, this is Stephanie Star reporting after what has been an exciting day of matches. The first round for Section ‘E’ has come to an end and tomorrow continues the Azure Cup Tournament! Tune in tomorrow for even more enthralling matches!”

‘E-1’

Adam

Adam

Wrath

Lust

Anwar

Anwar

Vindictive

Dante

Dante

Gabriel

Gabriel

Micheal

‘E-2’

Jessica

Sarah

Sarah

Montel

Gluttony

Gluttony

John

John

Cesare

Rob

Serenity

Serenity

Adam stood staring at Mars from the tunnel in Prosperity. It was hard to imagine that the war was still going on down there while they were up here fighting what he felt was a pointless tournament. His hands pressed upon the glass while he sighed, thinking about everything that has happened in his life up til now. The truth was that he still missed Amy and thought about her everyday. Even though she was gone he still swore he felt her presence floating beside him protecting him like she promise. He promised to protect her and he failed, he promised to be there for his friends and he failed, he knew he couldn't fail again...he needed to protect Sharon and get to the bottom of all the deception. His fist began to quiver; tears began to flow out from in between his tightly shut eye lids. His body fell to the ground of the tunnel as he was overrun by his emotions, he cried, crying was one of the ways of cleansing the soul of sin.

"You ok? Stephen told me I'd find you here." Ashley said quietly.

Adam quickly wiped his face nearly clean of the evidence of crying. He then stood back up and smiled.

"I'm fine; I just needed some time to think that's all."

"Stephen told me everything you know. About Amy Caecus and your friends, for what its worth I'm sorry."

"Its fine...it was two years ago not like anything can be done now."

"Well...I just wanted you to know that we're your friends, Heather, Stephen, Mario, me...don't try and run away drowning yourself in your pain." Ashley replied.

"Ashley, I'm sorry but nows not a good time for a lecture."

"It's not a lecture damn it! I'm just trying to tell you that we're here for you!"

Adam's eyes widened.

"Ashley..."

"You need to hear this Adam. I know you're running away, you always used to run away at school. You shelter yourself and it only consumes you, and what consumes you can hurt you. And now, you run into the cockpit of an MF to escape from everything. I saw your match today. You could have beaten him without resorting to the extremes that you did."

"What are you talking about?"

"You took out your rage, your frustration on your opponent. It was merciless Adam and I know that isn't you. I'm afraid that if you continue to hide your pain and keep it to yourself that you'll become dangerous, and uncontrollable in your MF."

"Hehe, you're deluded. I have much more control than that."

"Really? If so then why didn't you just disable your opponent and left it at that?"

"I did disable him."

"You savagely mutilated his MF leaving nothing more than a singed and butchered cockpit Adam. You over did it!"

"...I HAD NO OTHER CHOICE! If I didn't show what I could do then I wouldn't have made an impact! An impact on these people and an impact on Rebel! He noticed what I can do....I need to get him to question facing me!"

"Adam...you're such a fool." Ashley replied.

"You don't understand."

"No I think I do understand. You want to be the best, you saw the admiration that Rebel was getting and you got scared. If you let someone influence your actions...then I don't think you know what self-control is. If you stay on this path Adam...you'll become no better than those you consider the bad guys. We'll be in the lounge if you wish to join us." Ashley said. As Adam prepared to respond she

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turned her back and left the tunnel leaving Adam there in a state of shock. He shook his head, he was sure that she had no clue what she was saying. He then glanced at Mars on one side and then at Earth on the other.

“I...I have no choice...this is the path I have chosen...”

Chapter Fourteen: Segregated on the Battlefield

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Zach leaned forward against the edge of the plastic chair, the stems arched off the ground as his weight pushed against it. Reine had been sleeping in the infirmary since his match, it has been a few days now and Zach has constantly been by his friend's side. Even though it was a match and Reine knew of the risks he still couldn't help but feel responsible for injuring his friend. He couldn't remember clearly what happened during the match, his memory was blurred; he felt like he blacked out in Hades' cockpit and that something took control of the throttles. Reine wasn't severely injured but was stuck in what the doctor's diagnosed as a "minor comatose" state. His face had a few gashes, nothing too severe. Zach took a deep breath, his ears twitched at the sound of MF's thrusters in the distance. There was a television in the other room that boomed the current matches for the day. He didn't care, all he cared about was the well being of his injured friend, he made it to the second round, and the people fighting currently were in 'H' section. Section 'F' had finished the previous day, there was no one fighting that he felt was strikingly important to be aware of. He was waiting for the last section, 'I' to go. He wanted to see Stephen fight. But that wasn't until the following day, he did manage to squeeze in some time to watch Adam's match. He was shocked at the ferocity that Adam displayed during the match. It made him worry, he didn't want to get in Adam's way, he felt like Adam was angered about something and that the match reflected that. So since then he tried to steer clear from Adam until he calmed down.

"Hey..." Reine softly managed to mutter. His voice seemed weak and extremely soft. Zach realized that it had to take almost all of his energy to even say that simple phrase.

"Reine? Are you alright?" Zach jumped up from the chair causing it to topple over as his legs

"Hehe...I'm fine."

"Reine...I'm so sorry..."

Reine glanced to the side; the tubes that were feeding him liquids were becoming a bother as they hindered his movement. His fingers curled around a few plastic tubes bundling them together in his fist. With a quick jolt he ripped the tubes out from his arm, Zach's eyes widened as the plastic tubes began to trash through the air spraying the liquid all over the room. Zach raised his arms in an attempt to shield himself from the frigid fluids. Reine began to rub his small wound, a few trickles of blood flowed down his forearm dripping to the floor. It didn't hurt but it was an eye sore at the least. As the tubes began to calm down when the fluid ran dry Zach realized it was safe to stand up from the ground.

"What the hell did you do that for?!" Zach yelled.

"They were bothering me."

"My God man, shouldn't you have just waited for a nurse to take of that?"

"Eh, I'm impatient."

"Ya think?!"

"But that's not important...tell me, about the tournament."

"The tournament? Shouldn't that be the last thing on your mind right now?"

"Kinda hard not to think about it when it's the whole reason I'm here."

"...well, everyone else made it to the second round, Stephen hasn't gone yet." Zach replied. He picked up the fallen chair and placed it next to Reine's bed.

"I see...how'd Rebel do?"

"Rebel made it to the second round as well...he completely mutilated Crimson...he will win this tournament." Zach replied.

"Don't say that, I'm sure one of you guys will take him out. He's only human right?" Reine replied smiling.

Zach chuckled meagerly, he wasn't sure if that was a correct assumption. Everything that Rebel could do pointed to a completely different conclusion than human.

"Are you really feeling guilty over what happened to me?" Reine interrupted. He could see the guilt festering in Zach's eyes. As Zach's head slightly drooped to the ground it was confirmed.

"I was fully aware of the risks. And I'm alive aren't I? Besides, I just couldn't handle the stress its not like you were going to kill me." Reine replied.

"I know...but..."

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“Will you stop it already man. I forgive you if that’s what you want to hear.” Reine said.

“Reine...”

“Now will you do me a favor and turn on the television. I would like to catch what matches are left in the first round.”

Zach smiled as his fingers took hold of the remote control. With a quick flick the screen lit up revealing the young attractive GNT lead reporter.

“We are drawing closer to the end of the first round of the Azure Cup tournament with the last match of the day closing Section ‘H’. The previous matches have been an exhilarating ride and this match won’t be any different! Rey Fortis, a high ranking Major in the EAP is taking on Zero, one of the EAP’s most established pilots, he has been training under Rey. Teacher versus student, who will prevail? Find out next!” The cheery tone in her dialect made people wonder if she was serious. Every time she spoke she appeared to be in the brightest of moods it almost didn’t seem possible for someone to be constantly happy. Even if it was a front for the camera, but her audience didn’t care about her appearance, or her tone, they just wanted to see the match. People all over the world had become infatuated with the Azure Cup, whether it was the MF’s or the drama of struggle no one knew nor did they care. They needed something to get their mind off the war that was plaguing their world, and this was it. Luscious had succeeded in creating an event that would draw attention away from the horrific war that was only growing worse with each day. Both sides slaughtering the other, there no longer was a clear reason, they were fighting because it was what they were told to do. The South West Territory was no longer surrounded by weapons of destruction; it was a barren land riding up to the massive energy barrier. The war between the EAP and the TA slowly made the transition to a war of hate. There were no more logical or moral excuses decorating the war with pretty radiant colors, the commanding governments pointed their fingers and the soldiers fired. It would only be a matter of time before the war made its way from Mars to Earth but the people of the azure planet didn’t care. Their eyes were glued to their televisions, sucked into the drama of the tournament.

Once again like the previous days families crowded around their screens as two MFs took the center stage for a highly entertaining performance. Rey Fortis’ MF, Morsus was one of the first hover-type MF to partake in the festivities. Hover units were known for their agility, since the legs were replaced by a large flat circular booster the MF had much more agility than a biped or quadruped. These types of legs were known as Hover units because they could hover in the air, over water without draining a significant amount of energy. Underneath the flat structure were at least a dozen miniature thrusters that held a constant flame of energy. Inside the hover-unit was a smaller generator, one for the sole purpose of keeping the thrusters active, this allowed the main generator to use its energy capacity towards other energy consuming weapons. On Earth this type of MF would have a clear advantage but in space, it was on equal footing with any MF due to the lack of intense gravitational forces. Morsus was equipped with a hi-intensity dual laser rifle on both arms, and a multiple missile launcher on the back of the core. Rey also held onto a large metallic sword, it was placed in between the missile launchers on the back of the core.

Rey yawned as his arms outstretched in Morsus’ cockpit. His brightly hued blonde hair covered his crystalline blue eyes. His purple tinted jumpsuit wrinkled at the joints as his arms moved constantly. He wasn’t restless; he just wanted to get the match over with. Zero was his best student, and one of the EAP’s up and coming pilots. It wouldn’t be long before he was given the honor of joining the EAP’s highly admired Omega unit. Zero was a berserker in Rey’s eyes, but not like all of the stereotypical berserkers, he was smart. Zero didn’t just fight and attack on impulse even though it appeared that way; there was always a tactic method to his madness. Zero’s MF, Debello was the first of what the EAP hoped to be their first staple MF design. It was a frame that would be considered anatomically incorrect by human standards, it was a quadruped design, and it needed to be if it hoped to carry the extra weight created by the extra set of arm units that protruded from the sides of the core. The MF could be considered an octagon-like design as it had 8 total limbs. Each arm carried a different type of weapon, the upper right arm held onto an energy saber while the bottom right arm held onto an assault rifle. The upper

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left arm held onto a grenade launcher and the lower left arm grasped onto a plasma rifle. The sheer power being contained in just the arms was jaw-dropping. To finish off Debello's awing power was a linear laser cannon that latched onto the back of the core. Rey thought Debello's concept was a bit excessive but it was the design concept from the EAP's higher ups. They wished to have their own standard line of MFs for EAP soldiers to use; they believed that only the truly skilled warriors should have the privilege of having their own customized unit. It was a very simplistic ideal, one that even the TA was beginning to implement. It wouldn't be long until both the TA and the EAP were manufacturing their own units.

"I will defeat you teacher!" Zero abruptly screamed out from his cockpit.

Rey said nothing, he only smiled and grabbed onto his throttles.

"This is the moment I've been waiting for..." Zero fidgeted in his cockpit, he had been preparing for the moment where he would topple Rey; his one time teacher.

Ready? GO!

As the feminine announcer screamed Zero held nothing back. Debello blasted forth, the MF's four legs seemed dead as they lingered as the core leaned forward as it thrust. Rey sighed shutting his eyes in disappointment. He had hoped that Zero would have started the match at a much slower pace; give the audience a fun show. But at this speed he gave Rey no choice. A large yellowish flame pierced from the hover unit, Morsus erupted from its stance heading towards Debello in a zigzagging pattern. Just as Morsus approached Debello Zero sneered and strafed to the left at the last second causing Morsus to speed past. Rey was shocked; Zero had never pulled such a maneuver before in training. As Morsus' back was revealed Debello launched a tremendous assault. A thick beam of positron energy collided into the Morsus' missile pack. The force of the explosion sent Morsus tumbling, Zero smirked knowing he had the upper hand and continued to fire. A barrage of grenade shells, and plasma beams continued to pelt onto the defenseless hover-unit. Rey was tossed around, the restraints barely able to keep him restrained.

"Impressive..." Rey mumbled, he truly was impressed by his pupil's advancement. But he was worried. As expected the constant use of the plasma rifle drained Debello's energy reserve, Zero shrugged it off, he was confident in his unit's ability to recover energy at a rapid pace. Rey took the opportunity; Morsus quick turned around and headed straight for Debello firing the dual laser rifle. The thin focused beams of red energy impacted onto the core of Debello. Debello barely made any motions of movement due to its high stability. But the heat was increasing in the core at an alarming rate, and due to this the radiator had to respond in over drive. All of these issues continued to hinder the recovery of energy in Debello. Zero began to pound onto the control panel in frustration; his pupils were quivering as he glanced at the display screen every few seconds to watch Morsus approach.

"You never learn Zero. You need to moderate your attacks, if you don't then you're enemy will always have the advantage!"

"SHUT UP!" Zero screamed back refusing to listen to his teacher's constant critiques.

Morsus grabbed the ignited energy saber and struck the center of Debello's core. The gash only add to the heat issue, the quad MF finally stumbled back from the force of impact. Zero sneered and fired back with the assault rifle and grenade launchers. The onslaught of attacks engulfed Morsus knocking it off course. Rey smiled, Zero was getting more accurate with his desperation. Zero continued to pound on Morsus with the solid weapons as he tried to keep the distance so his MF could replenish its energy.

The intensity of the attacks caused the joints in Morsus' right arm to crack and sizzle with smoke. Zero's eyes quickly took notice and began to focus on that one area. He knew that it was now his teacher's weak point; he would focus all of his attacks in order to disable the right arm. All of a sudden his ears twitched in enlightenment, the pure satisfying sound of the energy surplus being restored eased his heart. He knew what he had to do now. Suddenly Debello burst forth with a commotion of energy. All four of the arms raised and began to jolt backwards as every weapon fired. The combination of solid and energy rounds spiraled alongside each other heading straight for Morsus. Rey quickly pulled his arms to his sides forcing the throttles to jolt; Morsus fly away from Debello while spinning around each round. Morsus then jerked around launching an assault of missiles, the cluster of silver warheads soon

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bombarded Debello. Zero kept his composure as he maneuvered around the majority of the missiles and shot down the remaining ones. As a caliginous array of smoke loomed in the darkness Morsus calmed down, each missile pod shut.

“...I know you’re not done yet Zero.” Rey began to whisper to himself. Everything was calm, serene; the crowd all stood in anticipation of the matches’ conclusion.

“REY!!!” Zero’s lungs fluctuated with the intensity of his emotions as he screamed. Rey’s eyes widened at the amazing speed that Debello displayed as it ruptured the stagnant sea of smoke with the energy saber extending forward. Rey screamed as well, Morsus charged forward also with the energy saber extended. As the two clashed together a blinding thin light of energy flickered brightly on the screen, everyone began to wonder if it was over.

Stephen and Mario sat in their seats calm, they were able to follow the action; they knew who won.

“He seems like he might be an issue in the tournament don’t you think?” Mario asked as he looked over at Stephen.

“Yeah, he seems like he’ll be a challenge.”

“You don’t look concerned in the least.”

“My mind’s elsewhere...” Stephen mumbled.

“I see, how’s Adam? I mean after that match he seemed a little “off”.”

“He’s got his own things he needs to work out. He’ll be fine though.”

“He’ concerned about that Rebel guy too huh?”

“Yeah, but not in the same way you and every other pilot is. He doesn’t seem to be afraid of him; he views him as an obstacle right now.”

“An obstacle? What the hell is that supposed to mean? Does he think he can actually beat him?!”

“No, he believes that Rebel is somehow connected with Genesis, and the deceit that has been plaguing the world. He’s only here to find the truth, staying in the tournament is a convenience for that cause.” Stephen replied.

“I see...and what about you?”

“Me? I’m here to win. Let Adam deal with this stuff for once. I want to enjoy myself for a bit.”

Stephen replied laughing.

“Me too...”

As the smoke slowly began to disperse the crowd was amazed to see the hover MF disabled, sparking with erratic burst of electricity. Debello loomed over its fallen opponent, Zero smiled and began to chuckle slightly as tears of joy began to roll down his cheek. Rey reclined into the comfort of his chair with an elongated smile covering his face.

“You did well Zero...now you have a chance to win this tournament.” Rey mumbled as he shut his eyes in comfort.

“That’s it everyone! Section ‘H’ has come to its conclusion! Who would have expected the student to topple the teacher? Now only one section remains in the first round! Once again this is Stephanie Star for GNT!” The same news report was replayed on every screen in the lounge in Prosperity. Dozens of pilots all joined together in celebration for their achievements in the tournament. The food court was filled with pilots all enjoying their small break from the action. Adam stared at the tournament ladder that displayed the massive LCD screen in front of the lounge.

Section F-1

1-Emanuel

2-Clark	Clark
3-Simon	
4-Bret	Bret
5-Sillohette	
6-Shade	Sillohette
7-El Nino	
8-Natale	Natale

Section F-2

1-Diavalo	
2-Sacred	Diavolo
3-Tempest	
4-Deus	Deus
5-Mike	
6-Omega-C	Mike
7-Eddie	
8-Wayne	Eddie

Section H-1

1-Nick	
2-Lucricia	Nick
3-Mathew	
4-Daniel	Daniel
5-Nightmare	
	Nightmare

6-Locust

7-Vixen

Mal Tiempo

8-Mal Tiempo

Section H-2

1-Freya

Nathan

2-Nathan

3-Seina

Seina

4-Lengrin

5-Lucky

Destiny

6-Destiny

7-Rey

Zero

8-Zero

Adam laughed a bit under his breath; he couldn't believe that most of the pilot's names were actually their names. The names in his opinion were just ridiculous and it would be hard to take them serious. As his eyes scanned through the list his heart nearly stopped when it read 'Nick', but he soon realized how common a name 'Nick' was and that it couldn't be him.

"Checking out the competition are we?" That voice, it was that same voice that mocked him from a distance merely by its calm demeanor. Adam didn't want to turn around, he knew once he turned he'd be facing his destiny and he wasn't sure if he was ready yet. He just smirked and replied keeping his back facing the man.

"It's good to be aware of your environment. How else can you hope to survive?" Adam replied.

"Hmm, that is a very good observation Adam. How true it is. But you're not concerned with these peons in the 'F' and 'H' section. We both know that."

"Hehehe...you're right. You're my only true concern Rebel." Adam replied.

Rebel358 slowly began to approach Adam but stopped a few feet away.

"I feel the same. I could care less about these other pilots. I've seen them fight, none of them compare to you."

"Heh, thanks for the compliment but I don't feel that it's properly deserved. The last time we fought, I barely touched you." Adam replied.

"That maybe true, but you were limited in what you could have done in that MF. Your instincts, your reflexes kept up with my own, I could feel it. I could feel your frustration; you would move your arms and throttles too fast for the OS to register your actions. I trust that when we meet in this tournament it will be a match to remember. So don't disappoint me and lose early on." Rebel replied with a light chuckle.

Adam sighed finally turning around to face his adversary but was met with nothing more than empty space. He sighed, but was soon uplifted by the sound of Sharon's voice.

"ADAM!" She yelled as she continued to wave her hands through the air.

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Adam smiled, his friends stood at the edge of the upper level of the food court waiting for him so they could start their dinner. His friends meant everything to him; he knew that in order to find out everything he wanted to know that he would have to get his hands dirty. To become what he was fighting against, he would have to become merciless if he hoped to defeat Rebel358 and uncover the secrets Genesis was hiding in the shadows. It was a long road ahead of him; he just hoped that his friends would still be there when things got rough.

Chapter Fifteen: First Round Completed

Alpha glistened brightly as it launched out into space. Stephen was the last one out of his friends to have a match and the lucky one to start off the Section 'I' First round. Stephen sat in the cockpit calmly; he had no worries about his match. Tyler Accido was an Ensign in the TA, no one was certain as to why Tyler entered the tournament; he had only been a pilot for about 2 months now and didn't have much combat experience. Tyler's MF, Grievance was a lightly armored unit holding onto dual machine guns and a massive grenade cannon resting on its shoulders in between an ERM launcher. Tons of debris floated lifelessly throughout the area, mostly left over MF armor from the previous matches; the maintenance crews didn't get a chance to clean up. As Alpha launched from the hanger its boosters ignited and Stephen eloquently flew through the stars. Inside Grievance Tyler's entire body was shaking fluidly, of all his luck he had to face the Crimson Knight in the first round. He knew he was going to lose, there was no possible way he could out match Stephen. That's what he thought, along with the other

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several pilots on Prosperity. Even though the match wasn't expected to have a climatic draw people still crowded into the dome to get a chance to watch the Crimson Knight in action.

“*YAAAWNNN*” The loud soft sound echoed outwards from Adam's mouth as he stretched his limbs. Sharon was already awake and fully dressed while Adam was just getting up. While Sharon fidgeted with her earrings she glared back at Adam who was falling back into bed with each passing ‘yawn’.

“You know this is your brother's match. Shouldn't you have the least amount of dignity and get up?”

“*Yawn*, why? I already know he's going to win. So... *yawn* why don't I just stay here and get the extra hours of sleep?”

As the thin crystalline earring finally stayed in place Sharon ran over to Adam's bed. Her fingers clutched firmly into the blanket and with one clean swoop the blanket fell to the carpet. Adam just glared back into her eyes, his eyelids thinning, and the serious expression soon faded as he yawned yet again.

“Seriously get your ass up. We're going to miss it.” Sharon said as she became fed up. Adam sighed and nodded finally giving into her demands. Yet he was still tired, his body slowly moved upwards. Suddenly everything went dark as his face was covered by a blue shirt thrown by Sharon.

“Hurry up already!” Sharon continued to yell.

“Alright... alright. Damn.” Adam replied as he finally began to get dressed.

A soft tap sounded, Sharon opened the door to reveal Mario, Michelle, Ashley and Heather smiling.

“So you two ready?” Mario asked.

“Ugh... I am.” Sharon replied as she exited the room approaching Ashley and Heather.

“Bro hurry up! Stephen's match starts in less than five minutes. I'd like to at least catch some of it!” Mario screamed.

“I'm coming I'm coming.” Adam said as he walked out of the room throwing on his jacket. Everyone just stared at him awkwardly, his long hair outstretched in all directions, it was messy and just an eye sore.

“Wow... bro, might want to throw on a hat, a beanie, something.” Mario replied as he clutched his chest laughing.

Adam just stared back. “Fine.” Adam replied. He quickly grabbed his black beanie that was resting on the table near the door. As the cotton beanie covered his head they were finally ready to head out.

The crowd all sat in their seats as the match prepared to begin. There wasn't much excitement brooding around this match as it was expected that Stephen Novus would be the victor. Alpha was a much better rounded MF in comparison to Grievance. Stephen sat in the back of his chair, he was the least bit antsy, his arms wrapped around his chest while he dazed off. It was hard not to just sit and enjoy the view, the stars burning brightly in the distance while the Earth continued to emanate a serene soothing glow. Tyler couldn't manage to shake off his nerves, his fingers couldn't even wrap around the throttles without slipping off from the mass excess of sweat that drenched his skin. His vision began to blur, his mental state was slipping. Just as he joined the military he got the opportunity to take part in the Azure Cup, this was his first live MF experience aside from the entrance exam. Suddenly the clock began to sound as the seconds began to dwindle. The match was about to start, Tyler then burst in an uproar of panic. He tried to hold onto the throttles but his hands continued to fall off.

READY? GO!

Neither MF moved an inch. Stephen's arms moved away from his chest and fell to the throttles. He prepared to engage his enemy but he had a feeling Tyler wasn't prepared to do the same. As Tyler struggled with the throttles and Stephen waited for his opponent to move the crowd quickly became restless. They would blurt out phrases “What the hell?! Let's get this started!” with every instant that

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neither MF moved. Adam and Mario glanced back at each other in confusion. They couldn't understand why Stephen wasn't moving.

"You think he's alright?" Mario asked.

"I'm sure he's fine. But knowing Stephen he probably doesn't want to overwhelm Tyler."

"Overwhelm him? What are you talking about?"

"Oh, you don't know? This is Tyler's first ever combat situation." Adam replied.

"Oh...poor kid." Mario mumbled.

"So Stephen isn't going to do anything that isn't necessary?" Ashley interrupted glaring back at Adam. Adam just sneered, he knew what she was trying to do, and he wouldn't give her that satisfaction.

Something snapped in Tyler's mind, his fingers jerked outwards in a perfect line. His body shook a bit for a few seconds, and then his mind was clear. His head which was lowered raised and his pupils became dilated. Stephen was forced back into his seat as he was shocked to see Grievance burst out in a blaze of fury. Apparently the crowd was taken by surprise as well. Both the right and left arms raised and began to fire torrents of chrome shells. The streams of shells fluttered forward at great speeds but Alpha was still too fast. The crimson boosters flared as the MF flew towards Grievance in a circular motion around both jet lines of shells. Tyler remained void of emotion and continued his berserk onslaught. Alpha then soared past Grievance in a spinning motion with the dual energy saber ignited. As he past the left arm flew off its joint singed from the attack. Tyler paid no attention to the damage and forced his MF around continuing to fire. With each shot the ammo was expended and continued to dwindle close to zero. Still none of the shells came even close to touching Alpha. The eloquence displayed by Alpha wasn't any surprise to the crowd, they all expected this match to be one sided. As the last remaining shells flew out of the machine gun the ERM's abruptly fired. The missiles zoomed towards Alpha and quickly exploded unleashing a rain of energy beams. Stephen remained calm, his breathing un-altered, his hands slightly moved the throttles and his feet touched down on the accelerator.

"This is odd...just a minute ago he was frozen in fear and now he's coming at me with all this unfiltered rage..." Stephen mumbled as he maneuvered Alpha through the torrent of energy beams. Alpha once again sped past Grievance and sliced off the right arm. Grievance tumbled a bit through space from the force of the attack. Alpha then turned around and headed towards Grievance to end the match. Suddenly the grenade cannon spun around and fired a shell towards Alpha. Stephen sighed; Alpha's right arm swung downwards slicing through the grenade shell causing a delayed explosion. As the shell exploded Alpha sped around the blinding sphere of energy and headed straight for Grievance. Tyler suddenly realized that his attack missed and turned to the side, but it was too late. Alpha slashed through the lower torso without stopping. A small explosion rocked Grievance and its cockpit. Tyler's head flung hard against the side display causing his helmet to crack. Stephen then let his feet up off the accelerators causing Alpha to calm down. The match was over, Grievance could no longer fight. The crowd went nuts even though they weren't surprised in the least. Adam smirked and patted Mario on the back.

"Well that's it for me. There aren't any other matches I wish to watch. I'm heading back to my room to get the sleep I didn't get last night." Adam replied.

"Alright bro. You get that sleep, because we're hitting the mini-bars in the lounge tonight! The first round is over bro! Things are going to get serious soon!" Mario yelled as Adam walked out of the dome.

As Alpha docked back into Prosperity's hanger Stephen continued to stare out into the void of space. There was a lot on his mind now; Tyler was the third pilot to abruptly break out in a berserk state of piloting. Both Reine and Zach went berserk in their match when they were cornered. He had a feeling something was amiss although he wasn't sure what.

The day quickly passed putting a close on the first round of the Azure Cup tournament. At one of the many Martian military bases the pilots of Red Fury sat around the table playing cards as the new played in the background.

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“This is Stephanie Star, and I’m proud to say that the first round of the Azure Cup has come to an exciting close. Please tune in next week as we bring you the live coverage of the second round!”

Anthony sighed as he folded pocket 2’s when nothing that he liked showed up on the flop.

“Damn, I’m out.” Anthony mumbled.

“Heh, I raise 15.” Eric said firmly as he glared at Carlos who didn’t even bother to look at his two cards.

“All in.” Carlos replied in a calm tone like he wasn’t even fazed by Eric’s raise. Both Eric and Anthony stared wide eyed as they looked back at the flop. It was ‘King’ ‘Queen’ ‘10’ all in diamonds; there was a possible flush on the board.

“I call!” Eric replied laughing. Just before he showed his cards Anthony looked over his friend’s shoulder to see the ‘3’ and ‘8’ of diamonds. Eric had a flush. Carlos shrugged his shoulders; his eyes were focusing on the television screen and the results of section ‘H’.

“Hey? Are you even paying attention bro? I got a flush!” Eric yelled as he waved his two cards in front of Carlos’ eyes.

Carlos shrugged his shoulders once again and tossed his two cards onto the table; ‘Ace’ and ‘Jack’ of diamonds, he had a royal flush. Both Eric and Anthony just stared blankly at the table as Eric just lost all of his chips in one swoop.

“Heh, look at that. The first round is done.” Carlos mumbled under his breath.

As Carlos mentioned the end of the first round, the screen was filled with the results of section ‘H’.

Section I-1

1-Tyler

Stephen

2-Stephen

3-Trish

Lance

4-Lance

5-Landon

Landon

6-Mark

7-Trey

Alex

8-Alex

Section I-2

1-Andrew

Tony

2-Tony

3-Cold Steel

Syrus

4-Syrus

5-Lucifer

Lucifer

6-Eve

7-George

Seriph

8-Seriph

As Eric cried with his head resting on the table Anthony glanced at his commanding officer.

“The Azure Cup? Why are you even paying attention to that crap? It’s their fault that this war has gotten uglier. If those stupid MF pilots just stayed then we wouldn’t have to send out soldiers on foot to fight the battles against ATs and BXTs!” Anthony yelled.

“That maybe true...” He paused to take a sip of his coffee. “But it’s because they went to that tournament that we got a job again. Or did you prefer to play pretend soldier?” Carlos muttered.

“I...umm...no. I’m happy that the USAF is back in active duty in all, but I’d prefer this pointless war to just be over with already. I mean, why are we still fighting with the EAP? I mean, we don’t even go near the South Western Territory anymore.”

“I don’t know...we fight when we’re told to fight. And we fight who we’re told to fight, that’s just how it is.” Carlos replied.

“I know...but Mars was supposed to be a sign of hope! Not misery!” Anthony continued to scream.

“We’ll protect Mars and its future by ending this war quickly.” Carlos replied.

“I know...”

Suddenly an alarm began to blare loudly in the basement of the military facility at Evo. Carlos quickly stood up from his chair as did Anthony, Eric sullenly rose.

“Looks like those bastards couldn’t wait until day break. Suit up men! Let’s teach those EAP bastards what happens when they cross Red Fury of the 3rd Air Division!” Carlos screamed.

Chapter Sixteen: The Never Ending Conflict

It didn't take long for the military base known as Evo to be lit up in flames of chaos and destruction. The EAP blindsided the TA, attacking in the midst of the night. The forces of the EAP consisted mainly of a battalion of ATs along with their own swarm of air fighters. Blazing streams of bullets tore into the ground causing an uproar of sand and debris to burst into the sky. TA soldiers were running in a panic trying to find cover, the ATs treaded forward with their massive elongated cannons firing recklessly, the war had indeed turned into a blind and malicious war. The EAP's fighter jets otherwise known as dragonflies based off their manufactured number, EAP-32A-Dragonfly, were tearing through the sky dropping bombs that exploded into the ground. As torrents of raging flames scorched the military facility teams prepared to take off to form a counter strike. Evo's main facility was the main TA central operations base; if it fell then the entire war would be handed over to the EAP on a silver platter. Each attack from the EAP was in the form of a crescendo, becoming louder and even more severe each time. Alarms continued to blare rigorously throughout the base as the soldiers stumbled to their units, ATs and fighter planes alike.

Each soldier had their own reason for fighting, for defending their beliefs, for protecting their friends and their family. It is unfortunate but not every story can be told and their chapters can come to an abrupt end in an instant, in the middle of a sentence without allowing for the action to become complete. It is a sad thing that every soldier has to deal with in his or her life, running out with weapons in arm not knowing if "this will be their last moment."

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The straps interlocked through its little lock as the dull green helmets covered their heads. The elite pilots of the USAF, Red Fury; they each gazed into the starry night as the Dragonflies continued to swirl around the base like ravens, waiting for their prey to die so they could feast.

“Not today...they won’t beat us today.” Carlos mumbled. He pulled his leather glove tightly to fit his hands, his fingers wiggled to make sure the glove wasn’t loose. He looked over at Eric and Anthony and nodded. That’s all he needed in order to communicate with his team, they had been together for so long that they could interact with out words, without commands, just simple facial expressions. The clear cockpit slid open revealing the instruments in their planes, the standard production model for the TA, TA-X92A-Viper, they were quick jets armed with powerful thin missiles, their venom. They also came equipped with machine gun turrets integrated in the obsidian wings. Each pilot jumped into their respected Vipers. As the glass slid over their heads they began to flick the switches on the control panel. The resounding roar of the engines and gears in motion were soothing to their ears, it gave the pilots a sense of familiarity as well as an adrenaline rush. Each pilot had their own pre-game as they called it; it was a way of mentally preparing before heading out into the heat of battle. As his index finger slowly brushed against the customized radio Anthony’s head began to sway from side to side. The music that poured out started out smooth and quaint but then abruptly became loud excessive drumming with heavy guitar riffs. He cracked his knuckles followed by his neck, he was ready. His Viper slowly turned around thanks to the two soldiers who pulled the jet with rope. As the block in front of the front wheel was removed Anthony pressed the ignition trigger causing a swell of flames to emanate from the back thruster. Eric and Carlos stared into their own personal abyss as Anthony’s Viper soared into the sky.

Eric took hold of a picture with his fiancée and child and just stared at it for a few seconds, but to him those seconds seemed like forever. He prayed under his breath, it wasn’t his time to die. His Viper too took to the sky leaving Carlos. His fingers fidgeted around a dog tag with the name “Angela Redentore imprinted indefinitely. His lips slowly grazed the dog tag and then he proceeded to place it under his shirt. His hands firmly grasped the throttle, the engine began to roar and his Viper launched into the sky. As the three pilots escalated higher through the clouds their eyes became filled with images of explosions marking up the ground below. It was a relentless assault, one that the TA was not prepared for. The surprise attack gave the EAP a clear advantage by throwing Evo in a state of panic.

Inside the command tower the ranking Generals and Majors just stared at awe. No one could have expected such an attack. The highest ranking official, General Copiare stood with his hands interwoven behind his back. His neck straightened as his face angled up towards the ceiling.

“General? What are you suggesting we do? Our main AT batallions are still on their way from Laguna, it will be another 2 hours at least until they arrive.” Major Samus replied. His voice was choppy, filled with the essence of fear.

“Don’t worry about it, this battle will be finished before they arrive.” The General replied as he smiled. The Red Fury pilots dashed through the clouds zooming past the massive window.

“Over? Yeah, we’re going to lose. We don’t have a complete battalion of ATs here sir. We only have Vipers and maybe one AT at the most. And the EAP is here with a full squadron of Dragonflies!”

“And your point is what Samus? I think now is a good time to start showing some faith in Red Fury. They are the best of the best, correct?” The General continued to grin.

“You want me to put faith into 3 Viper pilots? That’s absurd General!”

The General sighed and began to laugh; the room soon brimmed with the sound of Copiare’s laughter. His crystalline blue eyes suddenly widened, they were extravagant eyes, eyes that grabbed immediate attention. He was a behemoth of a man, it was a wonder how his uniform kept his muscles hidden, they were so immense and toned that every time his body moved the fabric would stretch and moan. His chiseled face was like a rock, sturdy and frigid. He was not a man to be trifled with. Major Samus couldn’t even look back at the General’s face without cringing.

“...I hope you’re right General...for all of our sakes I hope you’re right...”

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Bullets seared through the clouds forcing Red Fury to break formation. As the three Vipers separated from one another a squadron of Dragonflies sped past with smoke flowing out of their gun turrets.

“How many we got Commander?!” Anthony screamed out as his stomach rumbled under the stress of the gravitational forces pounding against the cold hard steel of the Viper.

As Carlos’ Viper flung around one of the Dragonflies firing shells at an alarming rate he glanced to his sides, he couldn’t figure out how many there were. Normally the radar would give them the answer but Dragonflies come equipped with radar jamming equipment and more than likely disperse a few jamming pods through out the darkened sky.

“Damn I can’t tell. We’re going to have to let our eyes be our guide this time guys!” Carlos screamed back. His index finger pressed along the crimson button on the main throttle causing a single missile to erupt out from the bottom of the wing. As the missile launched Carlos pulled his throttle to the side, his Viper steered away from the Dragonfly he was following and began to descend. The EAP pilot began to chuckle, no pilot would consciously move away from a bogey unless the target had been confirmed destroyed. Just as the Dragonfly tilted its wings in order to make a turn it was destroyed as the missile Carlos launched tore straight through the cockpit. The pilot’s life ended instantaneously, as the skin melted from the intense heat while the limbs were tossed in separate directions from the impact. They only float briefly before the disintegrated into the air from the explosion.

“Nice shot commander!” Eric screamed. His eyes focused forward as two more Dragonflies were flying dropping bombs onto the ground in front of him. His fingers wrapped tightly around the throttle, the pair of Dragonflies in front of him were causing the deaths of even more unprepared soldiers. He struggled within himself, he wanted to fire, to stop them from killing anyone else but the targets weren’t a lock. He couldn’t risk hitting one but missing the other, if he missed one of them then he’d allow the survivor to launch a counter attack. Just as the target box began to solidify around the targets the two Dragonflies split formation, each twirling to the right and to the left. Eric screamed in his head from frustration. The jamming decoys were finally out of range and his radar began to chime loudly. Both Dragonflies were descending towards his Viper.

“Shit they have a lock. This should be interesting..” Eric mumbled. His Viper quickly tilted to the left and began to descend towards the ground at an increased velocity. Sweat ran down his face, he had an idea of what he was doing, but he wasn’t sure if it was going to work. As the Viper spiraled towards the ground both Dragonflies flew up behind struggling to get a lock. The cockpit began to quiver from the increased G-forces that were conflicting with the Viper. As he moved out of the dense fogs his vision focused on a thin valley of jagged mountains. Normally this would be a sign to pull up but Eric stayed his course.

“What the hell is he doing?!” Carlos screamed as his Viper swayed from side to side avoiding chrome shells that continued to zoom into the sky. Suddenly the Dragonfly on Carlos’ tail exploded into thousands of metallic debris. Out from the cloud of smoke Anthony sped through catching up to his commander.

“I’m not sure...but he’s got two Dragonflies on his tail. We need to back him up!” Anthony screamed.

Carlos sighed, he looked back towards Evo, they had already moved far enough out of the area of operations. Explosions tore the ground apart as they lit up the shadowy sky. The ATs were continuing to demolish their base camp.

“Damn it. We can’t, Eric can handle himself. We need to take care of the ATs that are at Evo.”

“What?! You can’t be serious commander!”

“I am. We need to preserve Evo at all costs, we can’t lose it now! That’s an order!” Carlos hated being a commander, there was too much responsibility. He had faith in Eric’s piloting skills but he didn’t like relying on faith. He had faith before, in other pilots, but in the end they were just dust in the wind. Carlos’ Viper swung to the right and began to head back towards Evo where the balls of flames were still

igniting into the air. Anthony pounded his fist into his cockpit and reluctantly turned around to follow Carlos. As the two Vipers approached Evo they were horrified to see the massive amount of corpses laying the ground and the lack of respect that the EAP were showing them. The soldiers managed to take out two of the four ATs that were treading through but still it wasn't enough. The single AT that the TA had was already in shambles, the soldiers' lifeless bodies hanging out of the cockpit latch. The two remaining ATs rolled over any obstacle including the small hills of dead soldiers. The weight of the tanks crushed the bodies into the wind, their insides rupturing through the skin and exploding from the force of the turning wheels and treads. Carlos' fists twitched from the anger that flowed in his veins.

"Those bastards! Do they have no respect for the fallen!" His voice erupted from the communications stereo blasting into both Eric and Anthony's ears. Eric didn't see the horror, but hearing the rage in his commander's voice gave him all the information he needed. As his Viper closed in on the mountainous valley in front of him he felt a new resolve. He began to hate his enemies, began to look at the pilots behind him as an extension of the EAP and not as individual pilots with a past, with a life. Eric always hated when he had to kill a pilot, their deaths would plague his nightmare, he never knew them personally, but he knew they had a family and these faceless families would haunt his dreams, condemning him for his actions. But now, things were different, the EAP were slaughtering his fellow soldiers, crushing their soulless bodies as if to brag about their victory, he wanted them to pay. The rigid rocks that protruded from the mountains nearly sliced through the Viper's wings but Eric tilted his jet to the side allowing somewhat safe passage. The two Dragonflies followed suite, their wings tilted vertically in order to avoid a collision. A ringing sound burned into his ears, his Viper was locked onto. Just then two missiles launched the slight humming of their thrusters bounced off the beige formations. Eric refused to panic; he then took notice of a natural mountainous bridge ahead of him. His Viper slowly began to rise and the missiles followed, at the last second Eric forced his jet to abruptly descend under the bridge. The missile didn't have enough time to react and exploded on contact with the bridge of rocks and sand. Smoke violently swept through the air, pieces of debris flung onto the windows of the Dragonflies, hindering their vision. As the pilots began to panic the lead Dragonfly exploded into pieces as it ran into the falling structure of rocks. Flames flung out into the sky with even more torrents of smoke. Eric used the explosion as a distraction and flew out of the valley. At first he believed that he got rid of both Dragonflies but soon realized that one survived.

"Lucky bastard....come on...COME ON!" Finally his missile locked onto the remaining Dragonfly and fired. The missile soared eloquently until it collided with the Dragonfly sending its wings thrashing into the sides of the mountains and the cockpit to burst out. The pilot was launched through the plastic protective screen, his frail body twisting and turning through the harsh winds caused by the explosion. His voice screaming in agony, wishing for death, then everything became silent after the grotesque death the pilot was given. His body was thrown into a single jagged sharp rock that pierce the torso. Blood gushed out from the wound as the pilot's eyes slowly twitched until finally closing. Eric sighed but then turned around to head back towards Evo.

"This is getting to be fun!" Anthony screamed as another Dragonfly spiraled to the ground engulfed in a torrent of flames. Both Anthony and Carlos managed to disable both of the EAP ATs but were caught off guard by the arrival of 6 more Dragonflies.

"They just keep coming huh? Like insects." Anthony replied.

Carlos looked over his shoulder after shooting down another Dragonfly bringing the EAP air fighter forces down to 2.

"Yeah...but I don't see any more ATs, or soldiers on foot for that matter. Just jets...something isn't right." Carlos muttered.

Just then another Dragonfly swooped in on Carlos; the jet began to fire relentlessly forcing Carlos to bank to his right. It was a trap and Carlos knew it, but he had no other place to move. It was either head into the trap and struggle to survive or fly into a close by mountain range. Carlos' Viper suddenly shook as a warhead exploded near the left wing engulfing it in flames.

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“Damn, I’m hit. I’m going down!” Carlos screamed. His eyes gazed as the sun was slowly rising and then watched as his Viper’s left wing ripped from the core of the jet flinging through the wind. His Viper began to descend spiraling out of control while the two remaining Dragonflies began to close in on him. As Carlos prepared to eject he watched the two Dragonflies fall to the ground, their wings ripping from their cores as electrical sparks spiraled around their remains. He smirked as both Eric and Anthony’s Vipers swooped past. He knew it was safe to eject and did so, his body was tugged around by the wind along with the gravity, but after his parachute launched he fluttered down towards the surface safely. His hand reached in his jumpsuit pulling out the dog tag of his deceased wife. With his eyes closed he gently kissed the soft chilled tag. The battle ended, but hundreds of soldiers lost their lives in the attack by the EAP.

“I told you we’d survive.” General Copiare mentioned. He sat back down into the leather chair overlooking the entire base camp of Evo. The fires were extinguished, but the towers of smoke that covered refused to leave and continued to linger as a constant reminder of their lack of forces.

“Sir...Mr. Avidus from the Revelations Organization is here. He would like to speak with you.” Major Samus muttered.

“Fine bring him in...oh, and leave us alone please. Thanks.”

“Yes sir.” Samus didn’t like the idea, Revelations was a new Organization formed from the richest most powerful people in the United States along with Britain. Very few were politicians, but all of them had a hand in financing the TA military. In a way they could control the destiny of the TA and the war. As the head of Revelations entered into the room every military officer slowly rose to leave. Vincent Avidus was a young man, the youngest benefactor of the TA and the richest. No one knew where he got his wealth nor did they wish to inquire. He stood in front of General Copiare with a brooding smile lining his beige skin; his eyes were the color of topaz but could barely be seen as his long thin silver bangs covered most of his face. His hands were hidden inside the pockets of his expensive taupe suite.

“Mr. Avidus, this is a surprise. What can I get for you?”

“Heh, the question is how many can I get for you?” Avidus asked smirking. His presence emanated a cold disturbing vibe, one that General Copiare seemed to ignore.

“I’m not sure I follow.” The General replied.

“These are hard times that we live in General, with Genesis taking the MF pilots from both the TA and the EAP to perform in a meaningless tournament. Both sides are relying on inferior modes of combat. We at Revelations are beginning to become fed up with the longevity of the war; we wish to see it end at any means necessary.”

The General moved out from his chair staring at the young official awkwardly. As he began to move towards the window so he could gaze into the destruction he sighed.

“You mean nukes? I’m well aware that you and the other upper class gentlemen have suggested that as an answer to the war. Even if you finance the Trinity Alliance, you don’t completely control us.” The General replied.

“Oh, on the contrary, if we used nuclear weapons then we’d just end up destroying all of humanity and we don’t want that.” Avidus replied still with the smile on his face.

“If you’re not suggesting nukes than why are you here?”

“This is why I’m here...” Just then Avidus flipped open his beige suitcase and took out a manila folder throwing it to the General. The General’s fingers began to flip through the folder, he gasped in shock. What he saw was a specifications table for an MF under development.

“You like it? It’s the RV-Z32A-Shade, the TA’s new staple MF.” Avidus replied with a chuckle. “Do you mind?” He picked up a bottle of Chardonnay and began to pour some into a wine glass without waiting for the General’s reply.

“RV-Z32A-Shade? A staple MF for the TA? What are you saying?”

“I’m saying without MFs participating this is just going to be a long pointless war without an end in sight. And the whole idea of personalized MFs for the pilots was a good idea and all, but believe that if

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a pilot wishes to have a personalized MF then he's going to need to prove his loyalty to the cause and earn it. The Government has already green lighted them, and the Shades will be distributed to every military facility on both Mars and Earth. Training programs have been scheduled for this weekend. Don't worry we've already taken the liberty of sending the schedules to the qualified soldiers, mainly the higher ranking ones, ones that have already proven themselves to be capable of fighting for the cause." Avidus paused to take a sip of his wine while the General just stood in shock.

"So we're going back to relying on MFs then...what about the USAF pilots?!" He screamed.

"Them? Don't worry; they'll still be in active duty. They've proven themselves as a valuable asset to the TA. We're sending Evo about 50 Shades; they should be delivered by next week. I hope that they will be a guiding factor in ending this war." Avidus mentioned. He soon stood up from the table and proceeded to leave the room. General Copiare stared into the horizon as the surviving soldiers carried in the seemingly endless amount of dead bodies. Evo took a lot of damage from the attack; the General knew that, he also was aware that it might have been avoidable if they had a sufficient MF unit.

"Revelations...what are they really trying to achieve?" He mumbled as his face tilted against the glass window. His pale hardened skin pressed flat onto the frigid window and began to skid down as his body slowly fell to the floor.

"Are you alright man? You took quick a hit?" Anthony mentioned as he stared at his commander. Carlos chuckled under his breath as he sat on the edge of a military crate while watching the mechanics go to work on his Viper.

"I'm fine. It'll take a lot more than that to get rid of me." Carlos replied. "What about Eric? He hasn't said a thing since we touched down."

Anthony glanced over towards the exit door of the hanger, Eric stood at the edge just staring into the rising sun.

"It's been a while since he took the lives of another pilot. I think he's just a bit shaken up." Anthony replied.

"Why am I still fighting in this stupid war?" Eric mumbled as he stared at his trembling hands.

"Heh...is my only skill to kill people? Is that all I'm good at? WHEN WILL THIS WAR END?!" Eric screamed loudly as he punched the hard metallic shutters on the hanger wall. The collision caused the metal to vibrate sending out a sharp echoing sound to emanate through the hanger.

As the war continued to linger and escalate the second round of the Azure Cup began. Every pilot remained oblivious to just how chaotic the war was becoming, their minds were all focused on the tournament and who would prevail. The second round for Section 'A' was to begin the following morning. Barely anyone could contain their excitement. The news reports of the assault on Evo were pushed aside by reports of the first round of the Azure Cup and the upcoming second round. The matches were listed on every news station across the globe;

'A-1'

Zach Orion vs. Leo Ombra

Heather Pertencia vs. Michelle Dolce

'A-2'

Chris Procella vs. Caleb Prodito

Ryan Houston vs. Solice

Chapter Seventeen: Lingering Shadows

Adam and Sharon floated through the dismal corridors, his hands resting on the latch attached to the wall. The latch was a movement device that pulled whoever held onto it through the hallways. It was a quick and lazy mode of travel; it was designed for the MF pilots to use for when they were injured. As they hovered over the floor Sharon's hair fluttered gracefully through the small winds that were created from moving at the light speeds. Her arm wrapped around Adam's while she rested her head onto his shoulder. She was happy that he was spending more time with now instead of watching the matches or spending most of his time in the hanger working on Blue Dragon. Adam was a master at hiding things, although Sharon could tell. She could tell that he was concerned about something and that he was trying to keep it from her. She wanted to ask him, and give him the support that a girlfriend would give, but he would just brush things off that nothing wrong; it was for the best. Everyday that past her mind wandered, she would think about her father and how he died trying to protect both her and Adam. It tore her apart inside; she missed him, his voice, his calm demeanor and positive outlook. She was an orphan now with no parents, she had relatives outside of New York but none close enough to take her in; Adam was all she had now.

"Are you ok?" Adam mumbled as he continued to look forward. They were nearing the lounge where most pilots could just sit and eat while watching the matches. Adam decided to watch a few of the matches with Sharon alone; it was their first official date in a long time.

Sharon just nodded, she glanced back at Adam, her eyes were glazed with remorse, her lips were a pale pink as she gave a half cocked smile. She was trying to be happy, but her emotions, her dreams were catching up with her.

"I'm fine..." She forced those words out, she wanted to be fine, she wanted him to believe that she was fine; but deep down she knew he didn't believe her.

Adam chuckled letting go off the latch, the metallic latch continued onward through the corridor while Adam and Sharon just floated eloquently through the air. Her deep brown eyes gazed into his, she had such an innocence face, but it was twisted by pain and hurtful memories. Adam's hands grabbed onto Sharon's and he just smiled back at her.

"I know you're lying..."

"I...no, I'm fine..." Sharon tried to believe her own words even though she couldn't. Her head tilted to the side, if she continued to look at Adam she knew she would break down. As his hair flowed to the side he moved his body so he could get in Sharon's direct line of vision. '

"It's ok you know..."

Sharon smiled chuckling, her smooth fist rose in front of lips as she continued to smile while tears began to build in her eyes. Adam sighed and quickly embraced her. As the two rotated in the air Sharon began to cry, all of emotions just flowed out in a single instance. Adam placed his right hand onto her head and began to brush down the back of her head in a repeated motion while holding her close. Her

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tears began to escalate out from her eyelids and hover gently into the air as the two lovers remained embraced.

“I’m sorry Sharon...I swear to you that I’ll find out why your father was murdered and I’ll put an end to all of this.” Adam said softly.

She quickly pushed him away at arms length. The tears still flowing steadily into the air.

“Don’t you get it?! *sniff*”

“Sharon?”

“I’ve already lost my father! Do you think I want to lose you as well?! *sniff*”

“Is that what all this is about? You think you’re going to lose me?”

“If you keep this up, if you keep trying to dig into Genesis’ affairs then who knows what can happen. You saw what they did to my dad! To your friends! They’re not asking you to keep looking, they’re trying to warn you to stay away! Why can’t you just let your past go and live for the future?”

Sharon yelled back at him taking him completely by surprised. Adam just stared blankly at her; he didn’t know what to say. Maybe he was trying to make up for his past, he didn’t know.

“Sharon, I can’t just let everything they’ve done go...if I do then they’ll continue to do what they’ve been doing.”

“And what have they been doing?”

“I...I don’t know. The Chimera, the murder of my friends, the clones....and this tournament, it all points to something. I haven’t figured that out yet...but I will.”

“Can’t you just let it go? Leave the military, and live a normal life.”

“A normal life? What do you consider a normal life?”

“Not fighting every day of your life....not struggling with your nightmares! Just living to enjoy life, that’s a normal life!”

“Heh...you know I can’t do that. Not now, maybe after all of this pointless conflict is over. Sharon...I’m fighting to protect you and everyone else on Earth so they don’t have to fight. If we don’t fight, then we will all be consumed by our greed and thirst for power and eventually be destroyed by it.” Adam mumbled as he floated to the window across from his position. The Earth continued to rotate at a constant speed, the aura of its beauty was inspiring. Sharon then floated up behind him with her arm wrapping around his torso, she apologized and tilted her head onto his shoulder.

“I’m sorry....I’ll stay with you no matter what path you take.” She mumbled as they just stared at the scenery. The Earth look trivial when you could see a much broader picture, the sun flaring off in the distance providing light for every planet in the galaxy, and the stars flickering in the distance lighting up the darkened canvas. They both turned to each other; time seemed to slow down around them while their faces moved closer. Their lips caressed as their heads tilted at an angle. As they kissed the second tournament boomed forth in the distance. Their eyes remained shut but as each thunderous sound grew louder they knew the battle was taking place. Hades suddenly sped past the wind blocking out the sun leaving the silhouette of Adam and Sharon in a position of embraced engulfed in shadows.

Zach was breathing heavily in his cockpit, his opponent Leo Ombra was a bigger challenge than he originally anticipated. Forsaken was a well built MF, the crimson and grey MF soared towards Hades while firing its laser rifle. Hades flew around each round of energy barely escaping a few collisions. Zach quickly turned to his right and was shocked to see Forsaken already hovering besides him. The MF’s speed was incredible; Zach cringed as he quickly swung the energy scythe. The crimson energy seared towards Forsaken but at the last second the MF strafed to the side avoiding the devastating blow. Zach’s eyes shot open in shock, as Hades’ lunged forward due to the velocity for the blow Forsaken seized its opportunity. Leo smiled as he ignited his energy saber and slashed through the back armor of Hades. The attack shattered the top layer of the armor as well as slicing the rail cannon in two. A fiery explosion forced Hades to stumble forward as Zach lost control. Forsaken didn’t waste any time and burst back into the offensive. Inside Hades’c cockpit Zach became infuriated at the turn of events, Forsaken had been

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dominating the entire match, out maneuvering Hades every time. Leo was a skilled pilot, one that Zach felt he wasn't prepared for.

"Damn it...Reine, I'm sorry your loss was for nothing. I don't think I can beat this guy." Zach mumbled under his breath. Forsaken zoomed from left to right avoiding every plasma round fired. The thick beams of energy only caused Forsaken's armor to glisten radiantly in space nothing else. His fingers slowly began to let go of the throttle as he felt it would be best if he gave up. Once again Forsaken slashed the outer armor with its energy saber, the fizzling beam of energy sent more orange colored singed debris flinging into the area. The crowd watched in awe as Leo continued to pound relentlessly onto Hades.

Reine sighed as he sat up in his bed; he hated to watch his friend like this.

"Damn it Zach! You can do better than this! Try harder!" Reine screamed. The abrupt sound of his abrasive voice startled the surrounding nurses on duty. Suddenly the room was filled with women in ivory clothing all staring at Reine awkwardly. Reine smiled wide as he scratched the back of his head.

"Hehe...sorry."

The way things were turning it out it seemed as if Hades was going to lose. Just then Forsaken swung the energy saber once again. As the incandescent energy beam descended towards Hades at an angle something quickly snapped inside the mind of Zach. His pupils slowly changed to a crimson gradient, he tightened his grip on the throttles and stepped forcefully onto the accelerator. Hades' boosters burst sending the orange MF into Forsaken. As Hades' head unit crashed into the core of Forsaken knocking it off balance the energy scythe quickly swung upwards piercing through the armor on the right arm. The crimson beam protruded out the other end of the arm, Hades began to move its left arm so it could tear Forsaken's limb off but Leo countered. Forsaken's right leg suddenly cracked onto the side of Hades forcing it to be pushed away. As Hades was tossed its hands let go of the energy scythe leaving it dangling off the right arm of Forsaken.

Leo smirked as he glanced over at Hades.

"Heh, got some fight left in you I take it." Leo mumbled. "Well then, let's see you handle this."

Forsaken sliced through the steam of the energy scythe, the lower half of the scythe fell out of the wound leaving the energy beam half still lunged in Forsaken's limb. With the energy still focused and lit Forsaken dashed towards Hades with two energy sabers now ignited at the side of the MF. Hades quickly flipped over recovering and dashed towards Forsaken while firing the plasma rifle. The plasma beams were more accurate this time around and it was harder for Leo to avoid them. A few beams managed to collide into the MF while others were sliced in half by the energy sabers. Forsaken sped past Hades as it slashed the right handed energy saber. In the middle of the attack Hades' left arm shot up, its metallic fingers managed to grasp around the wrist of Forsaken's attacking arm. Leo was in shock no one had ever caught one of his attacks before. But he wasn't about to let this deter him from his victory and advancement to the 3rd round. As the right arm struggled to move forward Hades suddenly became outlined by a bright pulsating energy aura. Leo's eyes widened as he watched Hades' left wrist bend downwards crushing Forsaken's right hand. As the metal bent and burst into pieces the energy saber flung outwards and began to float in space. The upper half of Forsaken's right arm remained, and with the energy scythe still lingering in the armor Leo forced his MF forward causing the energy being emanated from the scythe to slash through Hades' right arm. Zach ignored his fallen arm and quickly grabbed onto the floating energy saber a few feet away. The boosters turned to a 45 degree angle and ignited, Hades quickly turned around in time to catch Forsaken's exposed back. As Zach screamed loudly Hades' left arm punched the back of Forsaken with the energy saber ignited. The beam of energy pierced through the torso of Forsaken singing the wires connected to the generator.

"Shit..." Leo mumbled as he saw the flashing warning signal on his screen. The generator was damaged and about to explode. With quick reflexes Leo unfastened his restraints, Forsaken's cockpit quickly opened to see Hades' left hand opened. Without second guessing Leo jumped out from the cockpit landing safely into Hades' hand. Zach smirked and turned Hades around. As the orange MF flew

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away Forsaken exploded violently. The shockwave of the explosion caused some turbulence on Hades but nothing to severe.

The crowd erupted in applause, Forsaken was destroyed its singed armor and limbs lingered through space while Leo just stared into the abyss while resting on the frigid surface of Hade's hand.

"Well that was quite the entertaining match." Mario muttered.

"It was; heh Zach made it to the 3rd round. I actually expected Leo to take the match." Michelle replied.

"Nah, I knew Zach would win. Shouldn't you be getting ready right now? I mean your match is next isn't it?" Mario replied.

"Yeah, I'm gonna head over to the hanger now. Wish me luck." Michelle mentioned as she kissed Mario and then headed out.

Luscious leaned back in his obsidian leather chair, his wine glass have full of mahogany merlot. Both Caleb and Severen sat on the luxurious couch on the side of the room. They were watching the live feed of the 2nd round. Severen began to laugh utterly as Leo lost the match.

"Well I'm just happy that he lost." Severen exclaimed.

"Ha, doesn't make much of a difference. He still outlasted you brother." Caleb replied after smacking Severen across the back of his head.

"What the hell? I'm not an MF pilot, and don't you have a match coming up? Shouldn't you be preparing?"

"Nah, I'm not too concerned. I'll win without much of an effort."

"Will you two be quiet for a minute?" Luscious interrupted. His eyes focusing on a small display screen on his desk.

A middle age man wearing an ivory trench coat stood in front of an LCD screen with a zoomed in image of Luscious' intimidating face. The man was quivering as he held onto a clip board with dozens of forms along with graphical statistics.

"As you were saying Dr. Klein..." Luscious mumbled softly as he took a sip of his wine.

"..Umm...yes of course... Well as you are aware the Beta group of artificially composed humans are defective. Their organs generate too much heat and in turn causing the H₂O in their system to evaporate causing a massive heat stroke. I'd like to say that these versions of our clones will probably only last about another 3 years, 4 at the most."

"Yes I am aware of that. And the Alphas?"

"Well Luscious, the Alphas are all testing to be in perfect condition. It seems that we got it right this time around; their organs function extremely well and do not seem to generate any excessive heat. I'd like to say that they should be ready for programming within a couple of weeks." Klein reported. He hoped that this was the news that Luscious wanted to hear, he saw what Luscious did to the other researchers who didn't provide results, no one like to die.

"Excellent...I am also fully aware of the 357 failed clones that were produced without my knowledge. Have they been disposed of?" Luscious asked as he put down his wine glass; his fingers wove together as he stared fiercely at the Dr. on the other line.

"I'm sorry Luscious but I was not aware of those..." The Dr. began to fear for his life and began to race through the papers he had in front of him. His hands became engulfed in perspiration that caused some of the papers to stick together or rip from the clip bored.

"I see...well if you do come across any reports having to do with the illegal productions of those clones by all means contact me. I want those files on my desk." Luscious replied.

"Yes...yes sir..."

Luscious shut off the communications relay and sighed. He picked up a folder that rested on his desk.

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“The Zenith of Artificially Composed Humans huh...did either of you two know of this project?” Luscious asked. Both Severen and Caleb shrugged their shoulders. It was the first time either of them had ever heard of such a project.

“I see...well it appears that it was started 16 years ago and created what they called the “perfect embryo” 15 years ago. It seems that your parents left some of their garbage around for me to clean up.” Luscious said just before he took another sip of his wine.

“I’m sorry Luscious but I have no clue what that project is. This is the first time I’ve even heard of it.” Caleb mumbled.

“That’s fine; this isn’t much of my concern at the moment right now. It just says that the project will reach its potential during its 18th life cycle, whatever that means. Anyway we have more important business to attend to, Caleb you have a match, go get ready for it. Severen since you’re out of the tournament I want you to head back to Earth and assist the research team with the programming of the Alphas. Everything you need to know about every pilot in the tournament has been gathered onto this one data disk. Don’t lose it.” Luscious replied as he handed the disk to Severen.

“So it’s really starting then?” Caleb joked.

“Yes it is...the future of humanity rests in our extremely capable hands.” Luscious mumbled taking a final sip of his wine.

Heather took a final breath before her cockpit encased her inside Blue Angel. She was content with making it to the second round, she had no real desire to make it any further but she wouldn’t mind if she did. The cockpit began to rumble as the boosters slowly ignited. As the restraints lifted off Blue Angel she sighed and her MF launched into space. As her MF flew gracefully through the vacuum of space she began to daze off. Her opponent in the second round had become her friend over the past week, Michelle Dolce and her Red Dawn. Both weren’t really equipped for high active close range combat, so she knew right away that it was going to be an endurance match. Her fingers wrapped around the throttles and her feet tilted onto the accelerator. Red Dawn was already in space hovering waiting for the match to start. Michelle too was a little hesitant about fighting her new found friend, but she didn’t want to lose at the same time.

It wasn’t long before the announcer declared the match a go. Michelle could hardly contain her excitement and Red Dawn erupted from its stationary position. Heather knew that Red Dawn was better equipped for close range combat than Blue Angel. She had to keep the distance like in her first match against Miguel. Ironically enough both of her opponents were from Lieutenant Procella’s unit. The sniper scope lowered in front of Heather’s accurate eyes and the rail cannon did the same. As the cannon began to gather energy Michelle began to laugh.

“That won’t work against me!” Michelle screamed. Red Dawn increased its speed and strafed to the left. Heather cursed under her breath as Red Dawn moved out of her line of sight. The radar continued to alert Heather of Michelle’s quickening approach. Michelle was approaching from the Blue Angel’s left so Heather quickly raised the solid shield just in time to block the pulse rounds that were fired. The rounds of energy bounced off the shield and dispersed into space. Heather jerked the throttles around to cause Blue Angel to turn to the side. As the MF began to turn the rail cannon fired creating a fluent stream of energy that sliced through the area. Michelle’s eyes widened and quickly reacted. Just as Red Dawn lowered its torso the beam tore past missing Red Dawn. Heather sighed and quickly retracted the rail cannon and began to fire with the sniper rounds while causing Blue Angel to boost backwards to create some distance. The solid shells collided onto Red Dawn’s core preventing it from fully advancing. With each attack Red Dawn was thrown off balance. Michelle began to laugh; she was truly enjoying the match. The gears in the chain gun began to turn; the onslaught of rapid firing shells took Heather by surprise and began to bombard Blue Angel. The shells were hitting Blue Angel at such a rapid pace leaving Heather no time to dodge or maneuver away. She was left with no choice but to raise the shield once again.

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“That shield is pretty handy but it won’t protect you the entire match!” Michelle screamed as Red Dawn continued its advancement towards Blue Angel. Heather sneered and began to fire the sniper rifle once again but the torrent of shells being sent off by Red Dawn’s chain gun hindered Heather’s accuracy. Red Dawn swerved from side to side avoiding the high damage inducing shells being launched by Blue Angel. With each miss Red Dawn closed the gap, then suddenly the chain gun stopped turning as the ammo was completely expended. Michelle’s eyes widened as Heather smirked.

The rail cannon flipped upside down and fired quickly. Heather had been charging the rail cannon the entire time waiting for Michelle to run out of ammo. The thin focused green beam of energy zoomed leaving Michelle with little reaction time. The beam punctured Red Dawn’s right arm tearing it off completely due to the velocity of the attack. Michelle punched her control panel, with no ammo left in the chain gun and the pulse rifle flinging through space she was left utterly defenseless against Heather’s attacks.

“It’s over Michelle you can’t fight back!” Heather screamed.

Michelle refused to give in, in the corner of her eye sparkled a floating energy saber left over from the match between Forsaken and Hades. She thanked God that the maintenance team overlooked the saber. Red Dawn quickly changed her course of action and sped towards the floating energy saber. Heather too caught notice of the energy saber and pressed hard on the accelerators. Blue Angel quickly sped towards the weapon in a parallel route to Red Dawn. She couldn’t let Michelle get hold of the weapon, Blue Angel’s right arm jolted back from each shell that launched out of the sniper rifle. With the missing limb Red Dawn was lighter and had increased agility. The left hand extended and managed to grasp the energy saber. Michelle smirked and Red Dawn quickly turned around and dashed straight towards Blue Angel. Heather began to get nervous, her nerves caused her accuracy to slip a bit, a lot of her attacks missed and Red Dawn continued to approach with the energy saber fully ignited.

Red Dawn quickly slashed through the raised solid shield of Blue Angel. The searing beam cleaning cut through the left arm. As Red Dawn’s attack continued Blue Angel moved to the side allowing Michelle to pass by revealing the side of her MF. The rail cannon continued to gather energy and fired as it lifted up once again. Michelle tried to avoid but she was too close to Blue Angel, the attack wasn’t avoidable. The beam of energy tore through the lower torso of Red Dawn, the sheer intensity of the attack caused the energy saber to fling out of the left hand leaving Michelle unable to launch an attack. Michelle began to breathe heavily, sweat rolling down her skin out from her pores. Heather was no different; the intensity of the match was much higher than her previous match against Miguel.

“Hehe...nice job.” Michelle was the first to break the silence.

Heather smiled. “Good job...” The match ended. Mario shrugged his shoulders as Michelle had just been eliminated from the tournament. Stephen patted his friend’s back saying that it was alright.

Adam nodded towards the television screen that was attached in the corner of the restaurant he and Sharon were at. A zoomed in image of Blue Angel filled the screen with text flowing underneath saying “Heather Pertencia advancing to the 3rd round.”

“Heather advanced! Good for her!” Sharon said.

“Yeah, she’s gotten a lot better at handling her weapons. Unfortunately it looks like her opponent for the 3rd round is going to be Zach.” Adam said softly while he took a bite into his grilled cheese sandwich.

“Unfortunately? What, you don’t think she can win against him?” Sharon looked at him with her eyebrows arched.

“To be honest, no. Zach’s got an edge, whenever he gets pushed into a corner he manages to overcome it and win with a ferocity not shown before hand.” Adam replied.

“I see...”

“Hey don’t worry about it. She’s done extremely well for herself so far.”

“Adam...”

“Yeah?”

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Adam glanced back at Sharon who placed down her sandwich glancing to the side.

“Thanks for today...I’m having a lot of fun.”

“Of course, you did come up here, the least I could do is show you a good time. Now come on, we’re pretty much finished here. Let’s meet up with everyone else.” Adam replied.

“Umm...Adam...”

“Yeah? You ok?”

“I’m fine....but...” Her cheeks slowly began to turn a hint of red. She was embarrassed. “I love you.” Adam chuckled, he knew she loved him, and he also knew that she knew he knew.

“I love you too.”

“So..umm...I’ve been thinking...” Her pupils slowly began to look around the room, she was extremely embarrassed. Adam then moved his head closer to hers. Her lips then began to move closer to his ears and she began to whisper. His eyes suddenly widened. He then sat back down and placed the money on the table for the bill.

“I guess we can meet up with everyone else later then.” Adam mentioned as he took hold of Sharon’s hand as they left the restaurant.

Rebel358 stood in the corner of the lounge surrounded by the shadows of the objects decorating the room. His arms folded across his chest as he smirked.

“This has been an interesting tournament so far...the H-3 is progressing nicely, a lot quicker than originally expected. I do hope he manages to survive long enough for me to properly assess his talents...As for you...Adam Novus. We’ll meet again soon enough.”

Chapter Eighteen: Tragedy Strikes

Caleb finally managed to prep Gemini for his match. He had seen his brother off a few moments ago as Severen began his descent towards Earth. The bones in his knuckles cracked while he prepared to engage with his opponent Chris Procella for the 2nd round of the tournament. The dark green boosters slowly pulsated growing in size and intensity each second. As the visor slid over his face Caleb smirked arrogantly, he had no need for concern, he was sure that he would make it all the way to the final round. The steady vibrations that shook Gemini were something that every pilot was used to, the silent adrenaline rush of the MF launching.

Chris Procella was a recently transferred Lieutenant now in charge of his own MF unit. So far two of his pilots were eliminated from the tournament; he was the only pilot remaining in his unit. Chris was a well known naval officer and witnessed the climatic battle between Blue Dragon and Magna Star two years prior. His dark charcoal tinted hair flapped in the wind exerted from Gemini's launch sequence. He stood about 5 foot 7 inches staring at his MF, Tempest; a biped MF holding onto a spread bazooka rifle along with a low ammunition grenade launcher attached to the wrist of the left arm. His main method of distraction however was a launching pod that fired out small spherical pods that moved autonomously through the atmosphere firing at a designated target, much like Blue Dragon's OWS, but not quite as advanced. He shrugged his shoulders once Gemini was out in orbit, he knew it was his turn to follow suite. As his hands firmly strapped the restraints in tightly his visor slid down from his helmet. Once the launching lifter moved into position Tempest roared out of the hanger soaring into the next match of the tournament.

The vibrant stars oscillated throughout the shadowy canvas while the two MFs moved into their positions. The tournament so far had been proceeding at a steady pace, the winners only able to breathe freely for a few seconds while the losers would beat themselves up over their performances. The tournament proved to be the perfect distraction from the war at hand, as the war escalated to chaotic proportions the remainder of MF pilots and even spectators just focused their attention to the tournament. Many people believed that this could be the new form of Olympics between nations, the tournament was that exciting. Corporations such as Revelations and its Eastern counterpart Prodigy surfaced to fill the void that Genesis left. Both organizations began to construct MFs for their respected Governments in hopes that they felt would bring the war to an end. People continued to be blissfully ignorant as the 2nd round continued onward.

Caleb watched as the light flickered to green signaling the beginning of the match. Gemini roared with intensity as it dashed to the side. Chris instinctively reacted; his eyes followed the subtle movements that Gemini was performing. The green and teal MF swayed to the right, the boosters angled to the left pushed out flowing torrents of energy in order to keep the MF moving at an angle. Chris wanted to watch, to let Caleb be the first to strike so he might be able to get a quick glimpse at how his opponent would fight. And Caleb obliged; both of Gemini's arms jolted back as the two bazookas's fired. Chris watched as the two obsidian rockets pierced through the vacuum of space. Tempest dodged the attacks finally making its first move of the match. Caleb sneered, he knew his attack wasn't anything special, in fact it was a simple maneuver and easy to avoid. Tempest suddenly began to speed towards Gemini with both of its armaments raised. Gemini did the same and the two MFs began to joust towards one another flaring with their weapons. The thunderous sound of the shells blaring out of the barrels boomed forth for everyone to here. A group of three rockets spread out as they headed for Gemini, two of those rockets exploded when Caleb countered by firing his bazookas. Gemini slid to the side dodging the final rocket but was caught with the abrupt grenade shell that was also fired from Tempest. The orange shell burst ignited a forceful explosion that managed to sway Gemini off its original course. Chris remained calm; a lock on box began to dance around the small image of Gemini that emanated from the main display screen in the cockpit. His thumb slowly advanced to the crimson button on the front throttle. On the back

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of Tempest's core the chrome pod flipped opened sending out a barrage of metallic orbs. Each orb began to spin horizontally while miniature boosters ignited allowing them to fly towards Gemini.

"Pft, what the hell is this? Don't insult me." Caleb screamed. Gemini began to fire the bazookas relentlessly; Caleb ignored the spheres that were now floating around his MF, following his every movement. Tempest just remained on the defensive, avoiding as many rockets as he could. Naturally he couldn't avoid them all and ended up getting caught. One rocket grazed the side of Tempest's arm, the intensity of the collision sent Tempest's off its path of movement. The halt in a gracefully dodging pattern caused Tempest to become engulfed in a sea of rockets. One by one each metal rocket pounded onto the core tossing it around like a doll. Caleb began to laugh, he had gained the advantage. Just as Gemini began to close the distance between it and Tempests the spheres began to move even faster blocking the MF's line of travel.

"Those things are still there? What the hell?" Caleb's eyes

As each bazooka fired the spheres moved avoiding the rockets. It was then that Caleb realized that they were no mere distracting spheres but something else. He then abruptly forced Gemini around while focusing all of his attention on the spheres that were buzzing around like insects. Tempest managed to recover from the rockets that were swarming him a few seconds ago and began to boost towards Gemini as Caleb appeared to be distracted.

"Heh, fell for it." Chris mumbled. He then pressed the button controlling the orbital spheres. The signal quickly transmitted to the sphere, each sphere halted in their rotation, just as they did this Caleb snickered.

"Got ya." Caleb screamed. The gears in Gemini's joints slowly spun raising the heavily armored bazookas into firing position. Before the green MF could fire each sphere opened in the middle revealing almost miniscule barrels. It was then that Caleb truly realized what the spheres were; suddenly the 3 spheres began to unleash a pouring assault of green energy beams at close range. The beams themselves weren't drastically powerful, but they were able to pound onto Gemini giving Chris some time to approach undetected. His throat itched in irritation, he couldn't believe that he had fallen for such a simplistic trick; his anger snapped leaving only his anger to control his actions. At first the beams continued to connect onto Gemini's armor every single round, but after a few seconds Gemini began to dodge each attack no matter how many times the spheres would change direction.

"Did you honestly think I would be done in by this? Hahaha, who do you take me for?" Caleb screamed. Gemini's laser cannon then flipped over its shoulder firing instantly. The yellowish tinted energy beam blasted through the 3 spheres. As smoke lingered amongst the debris of metal Tempest scorched by Gemini firing the grenade launcher, the shell exploded on Gemini's back completely dislodging one of the two laser cannons. As Caleb watched the ivory and grey elongated weapon of destruction floated singed completely. Tempest had already sped past the green MF and was beginning to turn around. Chris' eyes thinned focusing on his target; Gemini was lingering with smoke emanating profusely around the back of the torso. The grenade launcher hummed as it was about to fire another damaging round. Just as his finger retracted against the trigger the launcher did nothing more than screech loudly. He knew what it meant, he was out of ammo, and it couldn't have happened at a worse time. Gemini was a fast MF, especially for the weight load that it was carrying. All Chris could see was a green blur zooming towards him, Chris could even register what had happened. Tempest was thrown to the side and Chris as well. The rockets continued to pound heavily on the silver MF with Caleb showing no signs of letting up. Just then Tempest launched another unit of orbital spheres, this time he continued to launch them one after another until at least a dozen spheres floated in space. All of them suddenly burst out heading towards Gemini one after another.

"Again? Why not try something different? I tire of this match!" Caleb screamed. He fired the bazookas but nothing fired, he too was out of ammo; he didn't mind though, he still had his remaining laser cannon. Just as the cannon began to pivot on its joint the spheres all fired at once while moving around Gemini in random patterns of motion. Caleb began to look around frantically trying to get a steady lock on at least one of the spheres. The barrel began to hum loudly as the energy needed for the blast was

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generating. At that vital moment the spheres fired through the cannon causing it to explode instantly. The explosion was even fiercer due to the energy that was swirling inside; the blinding blast caused Gemini to flip through space uncontrollably. While Caleb struggled to remain balanced Tempest grabbed hold of its secured energy saber and sped off in the distance. With its right arm out in front of it leaning torso Tempest readied itself to strike. Gemini then struck Tempest with its right leg kicking it out of the way as Gemini tumbled around just as it grabbed onto its energy saber. As Gemini swung the end of its energy saber pierced through the upper layer of armor causing some the silver metal to flutter into the area.

In the hanger of Prosperity the space traffic control officers awaited the arrival of another transport of spectators. With the successful ratings of the tournament Genesis made tickets available to every man woman and child for attendance. Each ticket guaranteed its owner a single week of one round of action including room and board. However after that week was up they would take a transport to bring them back to Earth. This became a highly popular vacation package as thousands of people flocked to the nearest box office to purchase the highly expensive tickets at around \$1,500 per stub. The shuttle was expected to arrive within ten minutes, usually the shuttle would send a signal indicating where they were and how much longer it would take to arrive at Prosperity, this shuttle had no signal.

The chrome shuttle itself had just left Earth's atmosphere and began to enter space. The rumbling of the shuttle was normal and just an indication of it leaving Earth's gravitational field. But to first time flyers they felt a little sick and even began to worry. The children sitting next to their families enjoyed the ride like they would any amusement park. Their wide eyes full of innocence shined at the sight of the stars and of the glowing ball of azure that humanity has come to call home. The rumbling of the shuttle was a bit more extreme than usual; the pilots took notice of this instantly but didn't believe it was anything too serious to be concerned about. They got paid no matter what happened, just as long as they survived. The altimeters and all other internal gauges began to spin erratically giving off odd readings; it was then that they knew something was wrong. Both pilots glanced to each other hoping the other would know what was wrong and how to deal with the situation, but that was not the case. They were both bewildered at the situation.

"What happened? I thought all the equipment was perfectly operational before we left Earth!"

The co-pilot screamed.

"I...I'm not sure...but...oh my God..."

"What?...WHAT?!"

"Our navigational system is out, and 2 of our four thrusters are out, at this rate we'll shoot past Prosperity. I have little control over the direction of this shuttle now!"

"Try, try and hold it steady. I'll get in contact with Prosperity, maybe they can send someone out to retrieve us..."

While both pilots broke into a state of panic each passenger just remained ignored, buckled into their seats or amusing their children.

The control panel inside Prosperity was shocked as well once they received word from the shuttle. This was the first time anything had ever occurred on this magnitude. Every navigator in the space station began working vigorously trying to figure out where the shuttle was going to end up. Once they figured it out everything became silent, it was an eerie atmosphere that no one liked at all.

"Sir...at this rate the shuttle is going to fling right into the current space arena."

"This isn't good; the match is still lingering on. If the shuttle gets tossed inside the match then they'll be no guarantee of their safety. Alert the referees of the match! Tell them to call the match off!"

Both Gemini and Tempest had sustained a severed amount of damage; their armor no longer sparkled brightly but now was dull and singed. Their weapons were fully expended and were done to their energy sabers; however Chris still had his orbital spheres that were doing a precise job at distracting Caleb. As sparks of electricity flickered from the engaged energy beams both Gemini and Tempest

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remained clutched in struggle unable to move the other. While both pilots continued to apply pressure their radios echoed the words “Danger, a shuttle on its way to Prosperity has been cast out of its tracks and is heading towards your arena. It is too dangerous to continue the match. For now stop the battle and if either of your MFs is functioning then please try to intervene and bring the shuttle to safety.”

Chris immediately paid diverted his attention to message, suddenly his mind was filled with images of children laughing and having fun. He was a soldier, and in his opinion it was his job to protect those who couldn't protect themselves.

“Caleb! We have to save that shuttle! We can finish the match afterwards!” Chris screamed.

“What? You can't seriously expect me to believe you can you? You're a master of distraction! I bet this was some ploy to distract me so you could land a finishing blow well sorry to disappoint, but I'm not falling for it!” Caleb screamed back as his feet pressed hard onto the accelerator. As Gemini's boosters ignited the green MF began to push Tempest back gaining the advantage.

“You have to be kidding! Why the hell would I come up with such a distraction? Now move! If we don't then they might be caught in the cross fire!” Chris screamed. His last 6 orbital spheres launched and instantly began to fire beams of energy. The rain of energy continued to impact onto Gemini but Caleb continued to pay them no attention.

“You're kidding me? They're still fighting! At this rate everyone in that shuttle can die!” The head of the STC screamed.

“Wait, let me send out my team!” Ashley's voice suddenly interrupted as she ran into the control room. Her dirty blonde hair flapping in the air as her body began to float towards the higher level in the control room.

“You're team? What are you talking about? Who are you?”

“My name is Ashley Bellulus and I'm an MF operator for the TA. Now just move over and give me a head set.” Ashley said as she didn't bother to wait for the captain's response.

“Adam? Stephen, I need you guys to get your asses to the hanger we have a situation!” Ashley screamed.

“Already on it, I can handle this myself. I told Stephen and the others to just relax.” Adam replied.

“What? Just you?”

“Yeah, is that a problem?” Adam asked as he smirked. His restraints were already snapped into place, he was just waiting for the hanger doors to open.

“Ugh...fine. If you screw this up I'm going to personally kill you.” Ashley screamed firmly.

“Hahaha, don't worry. I think I can handle this.” Adam replied.

The large obtuse doors slowly began to open, Adam took a deep breath, he wanted another opportunity to enter space with Blue Dragon and try out something he had been working on for the past few months but didn't mention to anyone. Just as his feet began to move towards the accelerators his eyes widened as his entire MF began to quiver. He sneered, that vibration, the sound, he knew it all too clearly. It was another MF preparing to launch. Adam moved around so he could see out the right display screen to see who else was launching. The dark MF began to move and finally sprinted out of the background and flung out through the launch pad, Adam nearly froze in fear at the sheer sight of Shadow.

“Ashley what the hell? I thought we decided I'd do this alone!” Adam screamed.

“I know! I didn't send him out, no one did. He must have been waiting for someone to open the hanger.”

“Shit...fine. I'll deal with this. Adam Novus, Blue Dragon launching.” The cerulean flames tore out from the boosters as the blue MF shot out into space. Upon exiting the hanger Adam was shocked to see his communications screen light up. That face, he wouldn't forget it.

“Our first priority is to confirm the safety of the shuttle. Once that is done they we can deal with Caleb and Chris.” Rebel stated.

“Priority? Who the hell are you to order me around?”

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“I’m not ordering you around; I’m just informing you what is of the utmost importance. If we pay more attention to both of them then the shuttle might just inadvertently fly into the battle field.”

“...”

“Come on.” Rebel silently mentioned. Shadow zoomed away from Blue Dragon heading for the shuttle. Adam was furious, first this Rebel beat him in a match and now he was acting like his superior, feeding him orders. He shrugged it off though; he knew that he needed to save the lives of the people on the shuttle. Blue Dragon soon flew following the path that Shadow laid out.

In the distance Caleb continued to struggle with Chris refusing to budge while Chris was trying to do everything within his power to get away to aide the shuttle.

“Damn it! I don’t have time for this!” Chris screamed. Tempest quickly kicked Gemini in the middle of the torso. As Gemini fell backwards Tempest sped away heading for the shuttle. Chris was unaware of either Adam or Rebel already heading in that direction. Caleb abruptly swung Gemini around, his heart rate had accelerated tremendously; he never expected Chris to be this much of a challenge.

“Where the hell are you going?! You’re running away! I won’t let you run away!” Caleb exclaimed loudly.

Gemini violently burst out of its position flying towards Tempest. His green eyes caught sight of the shuttle that was quickly advancing towards them. At first he couldn’t make it out in detail and though it was just another one of the orbital spheres that Chris had been launching throughout the match.

“Another one...you bastard. I’ll finish it off quickly!” Gemini sped towards the shuttle at an alarming rate with the energy saber ignited. Chris wanted to get in the way but as Tempest continued to move it began to lose its energy fast. He was pushing his MF way too hard and paid dearly for it. Tempest’s boosters slowly died out leaving the silver MF floating lifelessly through space. Chris pounded his control panel constantly, he had no choice now but to wait for the energy to recharge, he could only hope that Caleb would realize that it was a shuttle and halt his attack.

The shuttle continued to fly without navigational or manual control, by now every passenger was well aware of the impending danger, if they weren’t told directly they could now see the advancing MF. Parents covered their children’s eyes not wanting them to see what was happening. No one could understand why an MF was approaching them in such an offensive manner.

Caleb continued to approach the shuttle; his body was in a searing amount of pain from the match. His exhaustion had hindered his judgment, his pupils were now bloodshot and his vision poor. No longer could he distinguish the shuttle from another orbital sphere. The distressed shuttle appeared as a target to him, another distraction launched by Chris in an attempts to defeat him.

Just as Gemini’s arm began to swing dozens of cerulean beams blasted onto the green MF sending it tumbling in the opposite direction. Caleb jumped out of his seat in confusion, he had expected the energy beams to come from the object he was heading towards and not from all other directions. Once Gemini stabilized he began to rub his eyes at a rapid rate. As his blurred vision slowly returned a grin took shape on his face. Blue Dragon now hovered in between him and the shuttle. The orbital wings quickly reconnected to the back of the blue MF as an outlining azure glow emanated from the MF. Adam reluctantly glanced over his shoulder looking at Shadow. The dark MF slowly clutched onto the out of control shuttle.

“You got the shuttle?” Adam mumbled. It really hurt his pride to make sure that Rebel made sure the people were fine.

“I got them. The shuttle has been retrieved; I’m heading back to Prosperity to deliver them safely.”

“Alright...”

“And you?”

“I’m going to stay here. I have some things I need to take care of.” Adam replied.

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“I see, be aware that the match has been officially declared as a stalemate and is over. They will be proceeding with the following matches in Section ‘B’ today as well in order to make the tournament go by quicker.” Rebel replied as Shadow slowly flew back towards Prosperity.

Adam smirked as he turned back towards Gemini; he was finally alone with the man that he felt betrayed him 2 years ago.

“I’ve been waiting for the moment where I could talk to you.” Adam mumbled.

“I see. Well I hate to disappoint Adam, but I don’t intend on telling you much of anything.”

“I expected that you wouldn’t. I’m prepared to beat it out of you.” Adam replied. The eight wings abruptly straightened outwards as Blue Dragon’s torso leaned forward.

“Oh...taking that path then are we. Well I’ll be more than happy to oblige.” Caleb replied.

Gemini took the first step at an offensive attack. The green MF lunged forward attempting to strike Adam. With ease Blue Dragon swayed to the right avoiding the attack and countered with a quick kick to Gemini’s left side. The intensity of the kick was light and managed to push Gemini away.

“I know you’ve been fighting Caleb, but I expected much better.”

“You...why does he want you?!” Caleb screamed. Adam’s eyes widened, he didn’t have any idea what Caleb meant. Gemini continued to slash without much direction, Blue Dragon continued to boost backwards avoiding every attack.

“What are you talking about?”

“Luscious! He seems to believe that you’re the key!” Caleb continued to ramble on. Adam then went on the offensive and slashed through Gemini’s left arm with his energy saber. As the arm fluttered completely singed and lifeless Gemini sped towards Blue Dragon continuing to slash the remaining energy saber. Blue Dragon then swung its saber as well; the two MFs became ensnared in a struggle as sparks of energy burst out in all directions as the two energy sabers collided.

“You’re not making any sense! What the hell are you talking about?!” Adam screamed.

“Ever since you were an intern, Luscious had his eye on you! You were the brother of the hybrid after all, so naturally you were a prime candidate for the Chimera project as well. But we all know how that turned out! You inadvertently caused the death of your brother and directly caused the death of your friend, Mike Aquilis. How does that feel, how does it feel to live on with the guilt? You nothing more than a pawn Adam, you’re not unique, you should have died alongside of your brother and your friend!” Caleb screamed.

“NO!” As Adam’s emotions ran high Blue Dragon sliced through Gemini’s remaining arm completely disabling Caleb. It didn’t end there, the azure wings quickly separately flying towards Gemini. Each wing began to pulsate with cerulean energy and quickly began to fire torrents of energy through Gemini. Each joint on the green MF began to emanate smoke and sparks of electricity until they became severed leaving Gemini’s torso and head unit intact. Caleb began to chuckle under his breath as Blue Dragon soared towards his one time ally.

“Tell me everything! And I mean everything! I want to know what the hell Genesis is doing!”

“Hehehe...” Caleb began to laugh as trickles of blood flowed down his face caressing the crevices and contours of his head. His head had been thrown around the cockpit the entire day from each attack that Gemini sustained. His visor was shattered; pieces of the thin plastic shards were imbedded into his fragile pale skin. Yet despite all the injuries he still managed to laugh, he knew things that most were ignorant to.

“Why are you laughing? Tell me!” Adam screamed. Blue Dragon then grabbed hold of Gemini’s cockpit. The metallic fingers slowly pushing inwards crushing the damaged armor, even though he was extremely frustrated he still had control over his actions and knew to keep the pressure back a bit so to not destroy the cockpit and killing Caleb in the process.

“Do you really wish to know everything? Do you think you can handle all of it?”

“Stop taunting me and tell me!”

“Hehe...*cough*...Well I guess I’ll start at the beginning then...*cough* Genesis has been pulling the strings belonging to both the EAP and the TA. This war is because of Genesis, haha, people

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are so ignorant it is truly amusing. Pilots belonging to Genesis...well you're aware of our dirty little secret, the clones of fallen military MF pilots attacked facilities on both camps. This instigated the TA and the EAP to conflict, after that human arrogance and greed kicked in and took the war to the point it is at now...*cough*...Now Chimera, heh, there was a plan. Since the screw up of Atlas...that's right, Atlas and the AI revolt was based on human error not AI evolution. The Government wanted a new weapon, a weapon that the EAP couldn't handle and thus order from Genesis a Chimera...and well, you know what happened next...*cough*. Caleb's head rocked as his conscious continued to slip.

"...no...Amy..." Adam mumbled. It was the first time he encounter the Chimera.

"Yep...*cough*...there were no terrorists at that exam, they were clones created by us. The Government needed Harold Caecus eliminated because of his morals. The EAP learned to hate the United States through Harold's extremely radical beliefs. The Chimera was sent in to kill off the "terrorists" because they failed due to your intervention. After that...*cough*...Nick went insane from the chip implanted in the back of his head...*cough*..."

"You bastard..." Adam slipped into a calm state of anger, he tried to contain everything, but he knew what he wanted to do. And if he was more impulsive he would have killed Caleb on the spot.

"I'm sure you'd also like to know about why your friends were murdered too *cough*...well that's your fault because you forced Sean Repens to feed you information. But if you'd like to know more about what happened then I'd suggest you talk to Leo Ombra, I believe he's more available now that he lost to your newest comrade Zach...*cough*..."

"Leo...that pilot is the one..."

"Yep...now, that should bring you up to speed I believe....Rebel358 should now be your biggest concern because you see, he is a failed..." Suddenly Gemini's torso exploded in Blue Dragon's hands. The explosion sent uproar of metallic derbis flinging in all directions. Blue Dragon was sent twirling uncontrollably from the explosion. Adam quickly stabilized the controls, his radar continued to beep radically. Another MF was now on the scene.

"You should have just let it go Adam...but no, you had to go and ask questions." Rebel358's voice was cold and sharp. Not at all like the tone he was talking in before or ever before since he and Adam had met. Adam shook his head trying to keep composure as he watched Shadow descend from the darkness with smoke protruding from the plasma rifle. He killed Caleb; Adam knew that he didn't want anyone knowing the true origins behind his existence. Blue Dragon flipped over and quickly flew towards Shadow; Adam wanted to end everything as quickly as possible.

"So you had to kill Caleb in order to keep him from telling people about your secret." Adam mumbled.

"I killed Caleb because he was weak, and weak people do not deserve the luxury of life. Now as far as you go, I'd suggest giving up on Genesis and going back to your girlfriend. You wouldn't want to get hurt." Rebel replied firmly.

"I've been hurt before, I'll live."

"Heh, at least your sense of humor is intact. I like that. I'm looking forward to getting the opportunity to facing you in your MF." Rebel replied.

"Why wait then?"

"You're not ready for me. Not yet anyway." Rebel said subtly as his hands moved over to the throttles. The soft eloquent crimson flames emanated out of Shadow's boosters and Rebel358 sped out of sight leaving Blue Dragon hovering in space just above the glistening Earth. Adam sighed and took off his helmet. The heat was getting to him, in more ways than one. As he brushed his hand through his hair he punched the control panel, he had never anticipated for things to turn out the ways that they had.

"Is it done?" Luscious' voice softly loomed through the communications display in Shadow.

"Of course, Caleb has been disposed of. But I'm not sure how much Adam has learned."

"Don't worry about it. Good job. I don't I could have done a better job."

Chapter Nineteen: Ferocity of the Wings

The tournament continued onward following the tragic events that took place during the early 2nd round. Chris Procella advanced to the third round after Caleb Proditto failed to return from space, Luscious announced that Caleb retreated back to Earth after his defeat at the hands of Chris Procella, however a select few knew the truth; how Rebel358 killed Caleb in order to protect his own mysterious identity. The days passed and the tournament continued to draw in the undivided attention of the entire world. In the passing days sections 'B' through 'D' had their respected rounds. During the 3 days that had transpired pilots began to find themselves doubting their commitment to the tournament, this mainly came in the form of Rebel358. His mere presence frightened off more pilots than any other single man in existence. Rebel's matches were flawless; his opponents unable to even launch a single attack without being torn to pieces in seconds.

Adam paid no attention to Rebel ever since he returned from his short lived long awaited encounter with Caleb, after seeing first hand the maliciousness that dwelled inside Rebel358 he knew he needed time to properly train, to get a firm grasp on the new technique that he had kept a secret from everyone else. He failed to watch Mario's 2nd round match against Penance, but it didn't make much a difference, Mario succeed and moved onto the 3rd round. As a matter of fact Adam knew little of what was happening in the tournament, how advanced and who lost. His lungs contracted as he took deep breaths, the heat inside the hanger was nearly unbearable, a soaked cloth towel wiped the sweat off his face while he reclined in Blue Dragon's cockpit. The computer screen was lit displaying the results from the Angel System diagnostic tests he had been running for the past week. The fact was that even with the Angel System there were doubts of how well Adam would fair against Rebel. A light flickered on the side

of the cockpit, it wasn't as luminous as the computer display screen but Adam wasn't paying attention to the information on the screen. The sound that buzzed from the small television screen only seemed to distract him from his work, but he left it there and on in case of any meaningful developments and also to let him know of the tournaments progress so he wouldn't miss his match when the time came.

“This is Stephanie Star and I am here to give you all an update on the Azure Cup so far! Here is the list of results from the past 3 days!” Adam finally glanced over to the screen as he closed the monitor for the computer.

Section 'B-1'

Mario

Mario

Penance

Phantom

Phantom

Mark

Section 'B-2'

Cherrybomb

Nex

Nex

Carlos

X

X

Section 'C-1'

Rebel358

Rebel358

Solar

Flux

Colin

Colin

Section 'C-2'

Vincent

Vincent

Snake

Rogue

Jose

Jose

Section 'D-1'

Ruby

Death

Death

Archangel

Archangel

Pestilence

Section ‘C-2’

Pride

Diablos

Diablos

Greed

Envy

Envy

“Heh, has it already been 3 days? Guess I lost track of time in here....” Adam then paused looking back at the control console for his MF. “It was all worth it though...everything seems to be working perfectly. Looks like I get a chance to try this thing out a lot sooner than I thought.” Adam mumbled to himself.

“Hey! You’re Adam Novus right?!” A loud low pitched voice bounced off the empty walls in the dreary hanger. Adam’s head soon peeked out of the cockpit to see a dark mahogany skinned man leaning onto the metallic gate separating walkway from the actual hanger.

“Yeah, who are you?”

“Heh, I’m Anwar Infusco and I’m your opponent for the next match!” Anwar blurted out while using his thumb to point inward like Adam couldn’t put two and two together.

“I see. Well is this important because I’m kind of in the middle of something at the moment.”

Adam replied.

“I guess it could wait, but we’re scheduled to be up next.”

“Already?!” Adam really did manage to lose track of time, he just found out that section ‘E’ was up, but he didn’t realize that he was the first match of the day. After the initial shock subsided he began to smirk, to him it shouldn’t matter when he would have to fight, as long as he could win it didn’t matter.

“I see, well then, good luck.” Adam meant it sarcastically, of course he didn’t want Anwar to win, but it just seemed courteous to say something even if you didn’t truly mean it.

“Thanks...I’d say the same to you, but I don’t think you’d need it.” Anwar replied jokingly. He had a sense of humor, right off the bat Adam could tell. As Anwar waved back to Adam while heading towards his own MF Adam smirked and closed the cockpit once again. He quickly turned off the laptop unplugging the wires connected to the computer console. He placed the computer behind his seat as he began to buckle his restraints. His right index finger flipped on the switch which turned on the generator, the silent hum of the engine pulsing eased Adam’s nerves, he wasn’t sure how his MF would react to the added strain that he was preparing to apply, he hoped that it wouldn’t cause too much energy drain. As the visor on his helmet slid over his eyes he began to sigh.

“(How much more blood needs to be spilled before I can find the true answer....)

Sharon ran down the corridors, her hair bundled up in a pony tail flapping through the gusts of wind produced by her running. She was late, extremely late; she was supposed to meet everyone for breakfast around 7 and then head out to the lounge to watch Adam’s match, the time was 7:30. Her nights

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had become restless, surrealistic dreams plaguing her thoughts. They weren't specific enough to be meaningful to her, but still it was the same repeated dream each night, surely it had to mean something. Her eyes stared forward but she was not at all focusing on her surroundings, after all there wasn't much to focus on, just two walls painted in a pallid tone of blue. She hated it when her mind wandered but it was hard not to, the dreams that she had been having were refusing to vanish and only continued to become more specific with each night. It was the same situation, the room was darkened with shadows and two men in lab coats could be seen lingering over her body which appeared to be strapped down. A thin needle always ended the dream sequence as it would head straight for her, each and every time she would jump out of bed at a loss for words, her mouth opened wide but no sound managed to come out. Just then her body collided into one a bus boy for one of the restaurants. As the two collided the force of the contact caused his bin full of dirty dishes tossed aside causing a domino of plates shattering into the ground, the ivory porcelain plates broke into hundreds of sharp dull rigid pieces. Sharon lay on the ground over the boy with her thighs spread apart while the boy's right knee extended upwards in between her legs. The boy lay on the cold floor while Sharon was awkwardly placed on top of him. Just as she found her bearings her eyes widened in embarrassment and her cheeks began to blush. The boy just stared back at her chuckling, his abstruse turquoise eyes glared into Sharon's own deep heart filled brown eyes. She quickly shook her head and moved her body off of his, as she slid to the ground next to him the boy smiled and stood up. As he stood at full height he appeared to be about 5'11 with an average build, muscular but not bulky. He brushed the food stains off his shirt as much as he could and then he extended his hand out towards Sharon.

Sharon reluctantly took hold of his soft delicate hands and stood up slowly.

"I'm so sorry! I...I didn't see where I was going, you see I'm late to meet up with my friends, and then there are just a lot of things..."

The boy began to laugh again. "Whoa whoa, it's alright. It was an accident, no harm done. Are you ok?"

"I umm...yeah...umm..I'm fine..." Sharon began to juggle her words, here she found herself unable to properly articulate her vocabulary. The presence of this boy, she constantly thought of him as a boy because of the title "bus boy" alone, but in fact he was a man. A well structured and in her opinion beautiful man.

"I'm sorry, my name is Gabriel." The young boy announced.

"Oh...." Again Sharon found herself at a loss for words, "I'm Sharon..."

"Nice to meet you Sharon, well I should probably get back to work. Hope to see you around." As Gabriel waved goodbye he slowly winked his eyes, Sharon remained in awe as she stood in a daze staring at Gabriel who slowly walked towards the fallen dishes.

"There's something vaguely familiar about him..." Sharon muttered under her breath.

"Sharon! There you are, we've been looking for you all morning!" Ashley's voice ruptured shattering the daze that Sharon was in.

"Oh...yeah, sorry about that. I over slept. Did the match start yet?"

"Not yet, but it's about to. Come on, everyone is waiting at the lounge we better hurry."

Anwar's MF, Dark Knight hovered in front of Blue Dragon. The MF was black and purple in color; it was a biped mid weight like most of the other MFs in the tournament. But its weaponry was unique in comparison to others; a side arm missile launcher was attached to the left arm while the right arm held onto a hi-active energy machine gun. Two elongated cannons extended outwards from the back of Dark Knight's torso, they appeared to be laser cannons but Adam couldn't recognize them. Anwar was beginning to become apprehensive, he knew that the match was going to be a difficult one but nonetheless he wanted to get it started. He was a 2nd Lieutenant in the TA under the supervision of Brigadier General Anulis, a hard hitting commander who had developed a strong reputation in the military for being merciless to his enemies.

Ready? GO!

Both pilots sat at ease once the announcer directed the match to start. They both seemed to feel calm during battle. Anwar wasn't about to give Adam the chance to end the match quickly, Dark Knight burst out of the starting position heading for Blue Dragon. Adam smirked at the impulsive behavior that his opponent was displaying.

"Head on...heh, I like that." Adam replied. The cerulean flames ignited in the thrusters sending the MF flying straight towards Dark Knight. Just as the two neared Anwar swayed his MF to the left and fired his arm mounted missile launcher without a lock on box. As the missiles zoomed past Blue Dragon Adam began to laugh at the lack of accuracy.

"That's it? You're kidding, all of that for a failed attack?"

"I wouldn't be so sure!" Anwar screamed.

Suddenly the radar began to beep alerting Adam of the missiles now heading straight towards him.

"Heat seekers huh...that means you don't need a lock to fire, you're free to fire whenever you wish." Adam mumbled.

"Yep!" Anwar screamed. Dark Knight suddenly began to fire the machine gun unleashing hundreds of thin focused beams of energy. Blue Dragon began to fly to the side avoiding the beams of energy while keeping track of the missiles coming up from behind. Adam smiled, he was enjoying himself, Anwar was going to be much more fun than his previous opponent in the first round. Blue Dragon docked the two laser rifles and ignited the energy sabers; the two metallic hands slammed the sabers together creating a dual side energy saber. Blue Dragon quickly turned around and began to boost straight for the torrent of missiles that were on path for a collision.

"(What the hell is he doing? He's completely ignoring me!)" Anwar's thoughts began to wander as he grabbed onto the throttles.

With eloquent movements of the right arm the searing beams of energy began to hack through the tempest of missiles causing hundreds of minute explosions to blare through the vacuum of space. Anwar's eyes filled with wonder at the speed and grace at which Adam managed to control his MF. Adam then glanced over his shoulder looking directly at Dark Knight.

"Don't worry, I didn't forget about you." Adam replied smirking. He then flipped on a switch at the side of the console. Instantly the forces inside of the cockpit increased dramatically causing Adam's body to slam into the chair. As Adam struggled to deal with the pressure that was constantly fighting against him he managed to smile once again

"(It works...now I just have to get used to this strain...hehehe)"

"Wait, what the hell?!" Anwar screamed as Blue Dragon now hovered directly in front of Dark Knight. It didn't seem plausible when a few seconds ago Blue Dragon was surrounded by the smoke from his destroyed missiles a few yards away.

At speeds that barely anyone could track Blue Dragon sliced through Dark Knight's right arm causing the singed limb to quiver away from the torso. The intensity of the blow caused the cockpit to rumble violently sending Anwar's body bouncing from right to left. A sharp pain quickly shot through Adam's head causing him to falter for a second. The strain was a lot more than he anticipated, he needed to shut it off and that's just what he did. As the system disengaged Adam began to breathe normally, his blurred vision began to slip into focus.

"Well that wasn't fun. Hmm, I'll have to adjust the system when I'm done with this." Adam mumbled.

Anwar enraged at the loss of his limb jumped back into an offensive position and fired hundreds more missiles from his launcher. Adam ignored the missiles and sped through the barrage of silos heading straight for Dark Knight. Anwar smirked as he was hoping for Adam to take that course of action. Just then the two elongated cannons began to extend out around the right and left side of Dark Knight while gathering energy particles around the tip of the barrel. Just as Blue Dragon approached the two cannons

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fired an immense blast of positron energy. The massive blasts began to spiral in space and eventually fused forming one intense beam of massive proportions. Adam knew he couldn't avoid the attack; his body was too worn out from the brief use of the new system he installed.

"Damn it...always the hard way." Adam mumbled. Blue Dragon quickly detached the two energy sabers and swung down just colliding with the brunt of the energy beam. The arena began to flicker brightly from the collision, sparks of electricity shot out from the edge of the energy sabers and the beam. Adam struggled to keep the stability within his MF. Anwar began to laugh as Dark Knight sped out to the left while Adam remained busy trying to deflect the beam of energy. As Dark Knight approached he launched another volley of missiles. Adam sneered as his peripheral vision caught notice of the newest barrage of attack.

"Damn it. I was trying to be nice." Adam replied. Suddenly the eight wings on Blue Dragon flapped opened wide and the orbital wings abruptly fired off one by one all heading towards Dark Knight. Anwar leaned back into his chair in shock.

"So those are the orbital wings..." Anwar mumbled as he watched each wing fire through the missiles causing them to explode. While this was going on the two thigh cannons lifted up and fired two beams of positron energy. The two beams pierced into the front end of Anwar's beam, with the added force of energy Adam managed to deflect the massive beam away from his MF. Blue Dragon's thrusters then lit up as the MF flew towards Dark Knight. Just as Dark Knight prepared to move out of the way Blue Dragon sped past slicing through the left arm and then again through the double positron cannon on the torso of Dark Knight. The explosion ruptured through the armor draining Dark Knight of its energy supply. As the eight wings connected back to the back torso of Blue Dragon Adam sighed as he stared at the lifeless MF floating in front of him. Anwar knew he lost, but he didn't mind he knew he tried his best but in the end his best wasn't good enough.

Stephen smirked while everyone else cheered for Adam's victory. He glanced around the room; no one had seemed to notice that brief instance when Adam's speed and reflexes increased dramatically.

"(Heh...so you went and modified the Angel System huh. Guess you weren't satisfied with its performance....you really do want to defeat Rebel now. Heh, I'm not so sure it's a good idea to let you face him, I might have to make sure that doesn't happen.)" Stephen began to think to himself. He knew that Adam was becoming consumed with Genesis, and that if he wasn't careful he might end up losing himself in a quest for vengeance. Adam still had some maturing left to do after all, and Stephen knew this well.

"Looks like he's moving to the next round." Mario mumbled. "You better not lose in your match."

Stephen began to laugh. "I don't intend on losing. I'll be making it to the 3rd round...(I have to...)"

"It seems that Adam has moved onto the 3rd round." Luscious quietly said. Rebel358 stood in the corner of the office with his right leg crossed over his left.

"It would seem so."

"We're getting closer you know. If this keeps up you might actually end up facing Adam in the finals."

"I figured I would be...I have to ask, is it smart leaving the other twin alive. I mean wouldn't he..."

Before Rebel could finish his sentence Luscious quickly cut him off. "Please, I don't have to explain my actions to you...after all you shouldn't have to ask, we do think alike."

Rebel smirked as he leaned off the wall and left the room leaving Luscious alone with his glass of Merlot and dozens of paper work.

Chapter Twenty: The Mercenary with Absent Memories

He was in a sullen mood after he sustained the drastic loss at the hands of Zach. Ivory bandages stained with blood covered the majority of his body as he rested in the infirmary. Leo Ombra wasn't sure what he was supposed to do now that the tournament had ended for him. His faded grey induced eyes glanced over to the side; his semi-blurred vision began to pick up the form of what appeared to be a man standing in the middle of the doorway. Leo slowly tried to move up from his bed in order to greet the man that was now glaring at him. It took a lot of his strength if not all of it to even move a few inches.

"You're Leo Ombra?" The voice softly spoke breaking the awkward silence.

Leo nodded as his weakened arms quivered from the weight it was holding. "I am...and you're..." His vision began to focus slightly as his fingers rubbed the sockets of his eyelids. Once in focus he gasped once he was able to identify the figure. "...you're Adam Novus..."

"I see...well that speeds things up a bit then if you know who I am." Adam replied.

"Depends I guess...why are you here?"

"Nothing too drastic, I just would like to talk is all." Adam replied as he cautiously entered the room. It was like any other infirmary room, painted a bright bleached color with pale plastic chairs and tables to match.

"So what do you want to talk about? I don't even know you personally; you're just the Azure Knight to me, a figure wrapped around the demise of the Chimera." Leo replied.

"I see...well I'm not looking to become personal acquaintances. Tell me what you know about Genesis..."

Leo's eyebrows arched in intrigue, he wasn't quite sure where Adam was going with this nor was he aware of any prior relationship with Genesis.

"I'm aware that they're the primary manufacturer of MFs and are the driving force behind this tournament."

"I see...what about Caleb Prodito?"

"Caleb...I'm sorry but I don't know who that is." Leo replied.

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The replies were not the answers Adam wanted to hear, they were just infuriating him. It was hard to take anything that Leo said seriously after the conversation he had with Caleb before Rebel killed him. Slight sounds of chuckling began to emanate from Adam's mouth as he slowly trotted towards the bed. The white sheets began to wrinkle as Leo's body moved frantically trying to find a single comfortable position.

"Well, sorry if I don't believe you, but it's kind of hard when Caleb mentions you specifically." Adam replied.

"I...I don't know what you're talking about..." Leo stuttered his words, his tone cracking with innocence and confusion.

"I think you do, you're just trying to hide it. Caleb told me some things...specifically connecting you to the death of my friends two years ago." Adam replied in a strong somber tone. His friends were a hot button for him, and if what Caleb said was true, if Leo was the person responsible for it then he didn't know what he might do.

"2 years ago...I..." His hands firmly clutched onto his forehead, a throbbing sharp sensation tore through his mind. The clarity that was in his vision faded replaced by distilled blurred images, he couldn't focus anymore; he couldn't even hear Adam yelling his name in concern.

"Shit..." Adam mumbled. He quickly pressed the alert button on the side of Leo's bed calling for the nearest nurse. Within seconds two nurses ran into the room pushing Adam aside. Adam just watched as the two nurses began to take hold of Leo's quivering body. He knew he wasn't going to get any answers out of him at this rate.

"(Damn it...)"

A youthful looking man slowly walked through the corridors after finishing up at his temporary job at one of the restaurants. His alluring blonde hair wiped through the air pumped out of the vents. As he continued to walk he slowly passed one of the coffee shops on the edge of the food court, Ashley, Heather and Sharon sat perpendicular to the window enjoying their coffee. At the sheer sight of Sharon's face the man began to smile. His hair was brushed to the back of his scalp in order to look presentable. His eyes stared into the window reflection of his face and smiled.

"Perfect." He mumbled. Before he could even realize what he was doing he entered the shop quickly locating Sharon and the others.

"Has Adam been acting strange lately or is it just me?" Heather blurted out as she placed her cup of searing coffee onto the coaster. Both Sharon and Ashley rolled their eyes.

"He's been on edge lately...I guess he just wants to win the tournament." Sharon replied.

"It's not that simple trust me. I've seen this before. Granted we were kids at the time but I can tell he hasn't changed a bit." Ashley replied sarcastically.

"What exactly do you mean by that?" Heather interrupted.

Ashley began to laugh, her hands flying fervently in the air. "You see when we were in grammar school he was extremely competitive. If someone got more attention doing whatever he began to act like that person and attempt to do it better. By doing this he thought he was giving people what they wanted to see from him, but in the end all he was doing was playing a role, and each time he played that role he lost a bit of his own identity. I can tell that this Rebel guy has become his infatuation, he's trying to steal the attention from him and by doing so is inadvertently acting like him." Ashley replied.

"You really think that's what's been going on?" Sharon mumbled.

"I'm pretty sure that's part of it. I would also like to say that he still feels some level of guilt for what happened to his friends. I wouldn't know first hand as I wasn't around when it happened, but when I brought it up to him about a week ago he seemed pretty defensive."

"That's Adam...he's always trying to hide his emotions like he is the only one whose ever sustained a loss." Heather replied.

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“No...I’m sure he knows we’ve all sustained losses, but at the amount he has in such a short period of time and for them to all be close friends. That has to add a new level of strain, I can attest to the fact that I’ve never dealt with that before....” Sharon replied.

“That may be true, but he needs to learn to just trust us. I mean we’re his friends....” Heather replied.

“That’s the problem...I think he’s afraid that if he gets us too tied up in whatever he’s dealing with that he might lose us too. And I don’t think he wants to sacrifice any of us.” Ashley replied. All three of them became silent, their lips just brushing softly across the edge of their cups.

“How much longer do you think he’s going to be like this?” Sharon asked cautiously.

“I can’t say...I haven’t been around him long enough lately to be an accurate judge. He needs to find what he’s looking for and fast if he ever wants to move on...”

“Excuse me ladies...” A vibrant soothing voice interrupted the girl’s chat forcing them to suddenly turn their heads and attention to the young man standing before them. Sharon’s eyes seemed to widen as she quickly recognized the man as the person from the other day, Gabriel.

“Yeah, can I help you with something?” Heather replied harshly but in a tone that was masked in purity.

“I apologize for the intrusion, but my name is Gabriel Calquez, I’m friends with that exquisite young lady right there.” He mentioned winking his eyes in Sharon’s direction causing her to blush instinctively.

Both Ashley and Heather turned towards Sharon with blank expressions covering their faces.

“We met the other day...I kinda...ummm, ran into him on the way down to breakfast.” Sharon mumbled.

“Ohh, so that’s what took you so long to get down here huh?” Ashley replied sarcastically. She was kidding of course; she knew that Sharon wouldn’t flirt with another guy.

As Gabriel pulled up a wooden chair next to Sharon he began to smile revealing his gleaming white teeth void of imperfection.

“No....it was an accident.” Sharon was quick to defend waving her hands trying to emphasize the accident.

“Well it wasn’t a big deal, we both just weren’t paying much attention and whoops, it just happened.” Gabriel replied.

“Whoops huh? Hehe, just an accident. A pretty young woman like Sharon and you just happened to accidentally run into her. Happens all the time.” Ashley replied. Her sharp tongue is what usually gets her in trouble but Gabriel just laughed it off.

“I can’t lie, she is beautiful. If we didn’t bump into each other then I don’t think I would have ever had the guts to introduce myself.” Gabriel replied with a calm demeanor just smiling back at Sharon. His face and his mannerisms made it hard not to chuckle or laugh or just feel at ease.

Heather just looked back at Ashley; they couldn’t believe that this guy would show up seemingly out of no where and just start flirting with their friend, who was in the middle of what they believed to be a serious relationship.

“Hey Sharon, it’s already 5:30, we’re supposed to meet everyone for dinner in a half hour. I think we should head out and get ready.” Ashley replied.

“That’s right; she needs to make herself look extremely attractive for Stephen.” Heather replied with a smart ass attitude.

“Ugh...get over yourself.” Ashley bitterly replied.

Gabriel laughed at the fun loving display of innocence that the two of them were putting on.

“Where you guys eating?” Gabriel interrupted.

Ashley and Heather cringed; their ploy to drive Sharon away seemed to fail.

“Heh, we’re not sure yet. We decided the other few nights; it’s the men’s turn to come up with concrete plans.” Heather replied.

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“Men huh, your boyfriends?” Gabriel asked. With every question he began to pry into their private life. Ashley knew what he was doing right from the start, most guys play this game; try and ask if the girl they have a crush on has a boyfriend but do it in a way they doesn't make them seem obvious.

“Yeah, something like that.” Ashley replied.

Just as Ashley's lips began to move Gabriel turned his attention towards Sharon ignoring the other two. “If it isn't too much trouble do you think I could borrow her for the night? I would like to take her out for dinner in order to apologize for the other day.” Gabriel replied.

“...” They couldn't find the words to express their emotions or thought processes. He didn't even ask if she had a boyfriend, he just automatically assumed that she was available.

“Umm...I assure you it's not necessary.” Sharon replied modestly.

“No, I think it is. It was rude of me not to pay attention to my surroundings. I must insist.” Gabriel replied.

“No...it's fine don't worry about it.” Sharon replied.

“Hey you guys. I saw you and Heather in through the window so I thought it'd be best if I met up you two. Stephen called; he said that he and Mario wanted to try that Chinese place on the other end of the food court.” Adam's voice echoed through the café. Both Ashley and Heather sighed in relief, they weren't sure when the last time was that they were so happy to here his voic.

“Hey Adam! Great timing.” Ashley screamed. Sharon's skin went pale nearly translucent at the sound of his voice and mention of his name. Gabriel noticing Sharon's awkward and surprised expression glanced over his shoulder arching his back. He then smirked as he recognized Adam and slowly lifted himself out of the chair. Adam's head tilted to the side just noticing Sharon sitting down next to this gorgeous looking man.

“And who is this?” Adam asked approaching the table.

Gabriel just smiled back at Adam extending his hand.

“My name is Gabriel Calquez.”

“Hi...” Adam then glanced at Sharon who was sitting with her eyes staring at the ground. “Hey Sharon.”

“Hey Adam.”

“Oh, you two know each other?” Gabriel mumbled.

Ashley and Heather looked at each and began to chuckle. Ashley's hand covered the front part of Heather's ear as she began to whisper.

“This is going to be interesting.” Ashley said softly through the Heather's ear lobe.

Heather simply nodded.

“Yeah you could say that.” Adam replied still refusing to look at Gabriel in the eyes.

“I see, well your friend is a stubborn one. I'm trying to offer to take her to dinner, but she just insists on turning me down.” Gabriel then approached closer to Adam's ear so that none of the girls could hear him. “Do you have any advice?”

This just managed to infuriate Adam a bit; he smirked and moved away from Gabriel walking up to Sharon.

“Adam I wasn't going to go to dinner with him you know.” Sharon replied softly.

“I know. You think I don't trust you? Heh, give me more credit than that!” Adam replied as he swung his arm around Sharon's shoulder bringing her closer to his body. Gabriel could take a hint, normally most people would feel ashamed at flirting with another man's girlfriend, but it didn't seem to bother him.

“I apologize, I was unaware.” Gabriel said.

“It's alright, can't blame you, I mean she is gorgeous.” Adam replied in a sarcastic tone of voice.

Gabriel nodded and began to head out the café but stopped just before his right foot left the shop.

“I dream too you know. Maybe sometime we'll get the chance to discuss these dreams of ours.” Gabriel said just as he left the café. Sharon's soulful brown eyes widened, suddenly she felt a chilling

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sensation sprint down her spine. For an instance her vision faded only to focus on a surrealistic environment one like in her dreams.

“You ok?” Adam mumbled. The sound of his voice dragged her back into reality.

“Huh? Oh, yeah I’m fine.”

“Good....about that guy.”

“I gotta admit, he’s pretty good.” Ashley said.

“What?” Adam instinctively replied.

“Yeah, he’s got charm that one. I’d be careful he’s obviously got a thing for her.” Heather interrupted.

“Please, like I have to worry about the likes of him...”

“Well you obviously have some form of concern, what were you about to say about him?” Ashley asked.

“Oh, yeah that. Well you see he just beat Dante in the 2nd round. He’s my opponent for the 3rd round.” Adam replied gazing out of the coffee shop as the man known as Gabriel slowly walked into the distance.

“What?! He’s an MF pilot?!” Heather and Ashley screamed in unison.

“Yeah he is....and a skilled one at that.” Adam replied.

“I see...OH! That reminds me! How’d Stephen do?” Ashley became curious it could be deciphered in the tone of her voice.

Adam glanced at her smirking, his eyebrows arched.

“Oh, interested in my brother huh? Well he won his match. He moved onto the 3rd round as well.”

“No....no...not like that. I was just curious.” Ashley replied in quick defense of her feelings for Stephen.

“Hehehe, whatever. Anyway, I section has finished and the entire 2nd round has been completed. So we have 2 days to rest before the 3rd round is underway.” Adam replied.

“Hey Adam, do you know why there isn’t a ‘G’ section in the tournament, it goes from ‘A’ to ‘F’ and skips ‘G’ and goes right to ‘H’ and ‘I’?” Heather asked.

“Hmm, guess I didn’t realize that before. I honestly have no idea.” Adam replied.

“Can we hurry up I’m getting really hungry!” Sharon interrupted forcing everyone to move.

“Ugh....why....why can’t I remember?!” Leo screamed in his sleep. It could hardly be considered sleep since he spent the majority of his time staring at the cracks and lines in the ceiling. His mind couldn’t rest peacefully, not since Adam Novus appeared in his room interrogating him.

“Why can’t I remember?!”

“Don’t worry yourself over such trifles Leo. Some people would love to have the opportunity to not remember certain events. But then again...the grass is always greener on the other side I guess.” The soft intimidating voice loomed over Leo who quickly jumped out of his sheets to see a tall man drenched in the shadows of the night.

“Who...who are you?” Leo began to mumble in fear.

“Ah, you’re memories are that distorted that you don’t even remember my voice.”

“You....” Leo began to mutter. His vision once again became distorted, he felt as if he was floating, floating in an endless sea of nothingness. Soon images, distorted images began to run through his mind like a slide show.

“Will you just stay still...I have no problem doing this the hard way...”

The voice echoed, it sounded familiar....it was his own voice. But he wasn’t sure where it was from or when.

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A young man's eyes flooded with tears as he stared at a girl's lifeless body. She twitched on the ground as a pool of blood slowly outstretched over the at one time cleanly tiled floor. Another girl was hysterical, she couldn't control her emotions; no one could. She fell on the ground with her arms shaking over the fallen body of her friend. She burst out into tears mixed along with partially high pitched screams. The man then burst out from his chair and reached for the gun that Genesis provided him on the day of his employment. The three men just glanced at one another and without any hesitation pulled the trigger. Three chrome bullets pierced his body causing an uproar of blood to spew into the air. The remaining girl quickly turned around only to watch her boyfriend fall to the ground covered in blood as well.

"SEAN!!!!....Oh my God...oh my God...why.....why ARE YOU DOING THIS?!!!"

Suddenly Leo snapped out of his trance staring at the mysterious figure that was still present.

"I see you still can't recognize my voice....fine. My name is Luscious Malum. And the advice that I'm offering you is to disregard the shattered pieces of your memory. You'll be afraid of what you find if you continue to look."

"Do you...do you know what happened to me? A young pilot... came in here asking me about something that happened 2 years ago..."

"Adam Novus....(hmmm, I guess Caleb leaked this much information to him. There's no telling what else he knows about.)"

"Yeah...Adam, the Azure Knight." Leo replied.

"I see...well get some rest Leo. You need it. I'll stop by in the morning to see how you're holding up." Luscious replied as he closed the infirmary door behind him.

"So? What happened?" Rebel358 soon leaned out of the shadows covering the corner next to the door. Luscious smirked.

"Adam is already looking. It appears that you were a bit too late."

"So he knows about Leo then..." Rebel muttered.

"I'm not sure if he knows everything, but I'm pretty sure Caleb told him to check up on him....Caleb always liked to play games with people. Give them the pieces but never the complete set, in the end the puzzle was always missing one or two pieces. He always felt that it wasn't any fun if he gave people all of the answers....heh, I liked that about him. Kind of makes me regret having him killed." Luscious replied while Rebel just stared outwards into the deep serenity of space.

Chapter Twenty-One: 3rd Round: Closer to Destiny

Zach continued to move past the hoards of people that flooded the lounge to see the current standings for the tournament and the match ups for the 3rd round, also known as the section finals. Each section with in each group had one match left to determine who would represent that section in the group finals. The massive LCD screen in front displayed all of the remaining matches for the week.

A-1

Zach Orion V. Heather Pertencia

A-2

Chris Procella V. Solice

B-1

Mario Liberalis V. Phantom

B-2

Nex V. X

C-1

Rebel358 V. Colin

C-2

Vincent V. Jose

D-1

Death V. Archangel

D-2

Diabolos V. Envy

E-1

Adam Novus V. Gabriel Calquez

E-2

Gluttony V. Serenity

F-1

Clark V. Silhouette

F-2

Diavolo V. Mike

H-1

Nick V. Mal Tiempo

H-2

Seina V. Destiny

I-1

Stephen V. Alex

I-2

Tony V. Seriph

Zach chuckled under his breath; he had to face Heather in the section finals. He knew she was a skilled pilot but he wasn't too concerned with the match. The crowd soon began to let up as they were aware that the matches would begin soon. Since there were only 16 matches left to take place in the entire 3rd round most knew it would go by quickly. The schedule had it for four matches in a day, within four days the section finals would be over and the group finals would take its place as the 4th overall round for the Azure Cup. Little were surprised at most of the pilots that managed to make it this far, especially with Rebel358. So far throughout the entire tournament he has finished his opponents in less than two minutes with his opponents unable to land a single blow. The trend of having more fear than respect when it came to Rebel358 became like popular culture, everyone felt it.

"You better win the section finals!" Reine's voice could be heard screaming from the back end of the crowd. Zach's head quickly turned around trying to follow the sound of his friend's voice. He didn't know that Reine was given clearance to leave the infirmary but he was thrilled that he was out. It was odd for Zach, before he came to Prosperity to enter the tournament he was only driven by the purist desire to be the best, now he's seen his emotions changed, the way he treats others. When he was strictly on the EAP's Omega unit he was strictly concerned with his own well being and only fought to be victorious, but now, now he's found a friend in whom he could confide in.

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As Zach's shoulders angled from side to side his arms pushed through the compacted torsos of unknown people while trying to make it out. Everyone was dying to see the current match ups and all ran to the lounge showing no regard to anyone else but themselves.

"Reine! Where the hell are you?!" Zach screamed hoping to get the attention of his friend.

Unexpectedly a hand pierced through the cluster of people grabbing onto Zach's forearm and with a quick and powerful tug pulled him out. Zach stumbled out of the collected people. Reine stood in front of his position laughing vibrantly; it appeared as if he had made a full recovery, his long hair waving in the air from the movements of his body, Zach could tell that he was happy which in turn made him feel a lot better.

"Quite a turn out huh?" Reine replied sarcastically.

Zach glanced back at the pack of animals that most of the pilots and spectators turned out to be. It amazed him at how primal they had become just to find out the current match ups. "Yeah, and this is just for the match listings. God only knows how packed and crazy it's going to be once the section finals begin."

"Yeah I know, it's going to be insane. Can't wait!" Reine replied energetically.

"..."

"What's wrong man? You should be more excited than I am. You're in the section finals!"

"I know...but I feel bad that you didn't get the chance to get this far. You're a lot better than most of the pilots who lasted this long."

"You're still all up tight about that? Let it go, I'm learning a lot from watching these matches. And don't worry; I'll make it to the end in the next one!"

"Is there going to be another one?"

"I don't know haha. Trying to make you feel better pal. Now shouldn't you be hurrying to the hanger?"

"Oh crap! I keep forgetting I'm the first up. You better be routing for me!" Zach screamed. He sprinted out of the lounge pushing his legs as hard as he could. Reine just continued to laugh.

"He's going to make it to the end, I can tell."

"So we're already into the section finals...I have to say this came around a lot quicker than I expected it to." Rebel358's voice echoed out of the shadows while Luscious sat staring at the flickering television screen.

"Luscious..."

"Isn't it magnificent?"

"Huh?" Rebel glanced over at the screen which displayed a raging battle.

"War...humans still crave it even after they witness all the chaos it creates."

"Humans are ignorant and know nothing more than blood and death. Their time is drawing to an end."

"I agree...but I think we might not have to interfere. With Revelations and Prodigy doing our work in the wake of our tournament this war will continue to escalate to horrific proportions. And with any luck we'll just have to disperse the clones to clean up the mess and we won't have to deal with any massive resistance." Luscious replied. The taste of the crimson wine soothed his throat as it slowly rolled out of the thin crystalline glass.

"It seems that they've managed to gain the advantage of MFs once again. I mean with the production of the Shades and the Night-Wings." Rebel replied.

"*Sigh*, yeah. I was hoping that they would have been able to continue this war without the assistance of the MF. But I guess they've become too attached to that luxury to give it up."

"It can't be helped I guess...you know you never did tell me the true reason for this tournament. It couldn't have been simply to take the MFs away from both the TA and the EAP..."

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The red wine glass touched the table in front of Luscious' crossed legs as the man himself leaned forward smirking at Rebel358. Rebel's crimson hued eyes thinned for a second but as he began to think he soon came to his own conclusion.

"...you're preparing the clones for battle aren't you? You're preparing to reveal Utopia a lot earlier than you originally said."

"I told you we think alike." Luscious replied.

"I see...so what happens to the pilots after the tournament? You can't possibly need them after you've acquired all the data...are you just going to kill them all and replace them with the batch of clones created in the Alpha system?"

"I'm not completely sure. What happens to the pilots after the conclusion of the Azure Cup doesn't matter to me. I already collected the information I needed during the first round. Every analytical data on every pilot has already been brought back to Earth with Severen. The artificially created humans will be trained according to the data on the disc...unfortunately it's going to take a good amount of time."

"How much time?"

"About 3 years before they can be considered stable enough to enter battle."

"3 YEARS!?! That's too long of time Luscious! The revelation needs to happen now! While humanity is struggling, it will be quicker for us to wipe out every sinner on both Earth and Mars while they're engaging with one another!" Rebel screamed out. He ran towards Luscious grabbing onto his silver ironed shirt and tie. As Rebel's quivering hands pulled onto the shirt bringing Luscious' face closer to his own he felt as if he was staring into a mirror or a pond. His eyes widened as a sharp sensation shot through his brain causing him to stumble backwards crashing into the table that was behind him.

"Something the matter?" Luscious calmly asked as he leaned over to look at his fallen comrade. Rebel's hands scraped against the shattered pieces of glass that lined the floor. With each movement of his arms even more shards of glass would embed themselves into this cold skin.

"I...I...we need to finish this quickly Luscious!"

"I don't recall ever asking for your assistance, hell I don't recall asking for your creation. You are a mistake, something that should have never come to fruition." Luscious said mockingly as he took another sip of his chilled wine.

"...you..." Rebel muttered as he stared into the beast that stood before him, Luscious had shared the same dream he had, to recreate humanity in a purified image void of sin. However it became obvious that they differed in how they would create this reality. Rebel managed to regain his composure, his right hand placed itself onto a shelf behind his stumbling body and he quickly pulled himself back onto his feet.

"What are you..." Rebel mumbled under his breath.

"Now Heather you need to relax, Zach is going to be a difficult opponent and you can't be freaking out before the match begins." Stephen said firmly. Heather nodded her head in response to Stephen's advice; she had honestly been surprised at how she managed to last this long in the tournament. Blue Angel was already turned on humming with the power being generated from its main battery. The clear visor that slid down from the teal helmet was engulfed in fog, her breathing patterns were erratic, it was clear that she was extremely nervous.

"Easier said than done..." Heather mumbled.

"Will you just chill out already? Damn, you're better than you think. Now just go out there and do your best!" Adam screamed from the top of the hanger. He leaned over the gray guard rail that loomed over the garage of MFs. Stephen sighed smacking his head while Sharon's right hand skid across the top of Adam's skull.

"OW?!? What the hell was that for?!" Adam instinctively screamed back.

"Leave her alone. She's stressing out and doesn't need your wise ass remarks." Sharon said while sticking her tongue out at Adam. "You'll do fine Heather! We'll be cheering for you!" Sharon yelled.

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Heather sighed as she stared out into space where Hades was already waiting.

“Come on you’ll do fine.” Stephen replied.

“Thanks...” Some how she didn’t seem convinced like she had already accepted her defeat at the hands of Zach and his MF.

“Zach is definitely a close range opponent so keep that in mind and try to keep the distance between you and Hades.” Stephen replied.

“Good luck Heather! No matter what happens we’re still taking you out to dinner after the match!” Ashley’s vibrant voice echoed from Heather’s ear piece. Her friends had proven their support; she became determined to at the very least try her best.

“Alright...I’ll do my best. Thanks guys.” Heather replied. Stephen smirked as he pushed himself away from Blue Angel’s cockpit floating towards the guard rail above. The mechanical gears rotated as the bright doors slid shut sealing Heather in the cockpit of Blue Angel. The inner lights began to flicker eventually fully igniting lighting up the room and saving her from the shadows of her fears. As the display screen turned on and all systems were confirmed to be green she lightly tapped onto the accelerators causing the thrusters to ignite.

“Ladies and Gentlemen I would like to welcome you to the 3rd round of the Azure Cup tournament! We are coming close to the end with this being the sectional finals! Each winner will face the other winner in their grouping, so the winner of this match will go on to face the winner of A-2 and the winner in that match will go on to represent group A in the group tournament all leading up to the semi-finals of the Azure Cup!” The feminine announcer bellowed out of the loud speaker as the lounge and dome were filled to maximum capacity with MF pilots and civilians alike all on the edge of their seats waiting for the start of the match.

Ready?! GO!

Zach stared deeply at Blue Angel; he knew it would be an interesting match. An uphill one if he allowed her to keep the rail cannon on her MF. That was the key to her previous victories; Heather knew how to use the cannon and was extremely accurate when firing it. Hades shot to the left speeding out of Heather’s line of sight. Heather quickly turned her MF to the side, but she still was unable to locate her agile opponent.

“Where did you go....come on...come on...I can find you...” Heather started to speak out of frustration. She hated it when she couldn’t determine the location of her opponent. She had no way of properly measuring the distance she had from her opponent. Realizing that at her current rate she wouldn’t be able to keep an upper hand she quickly forced Blue Angel to dash to the left, she hoped that by moving she would force Zach to fire and in turn reveal his location.

As Blue Angel flew away from her position Zach’s eyes began to focus on the slowly moving MF. Hades’ right arm raised and then abruptly jerked from the intensity of the rounds that fired from the plasma rifle. Suddenly Blue Angel’s radar began to sound off loudly alerting her of the impending danger.

“Shit he’s behind!” Blue Angel quickly turned around while lifting the solid shield just in time. Each plasma round burst onto the shield one after another. The force from the collision turned out to be too much for the MF’s left arm to handle, the joints began to crack and burn from the constant jerking motion that was occurring. Zach didn’t let up and continued to fire plasma rounds constantly leaving Heather no choice but to remain in a defensive position. She knew that being stuck in the defensive position with her face looking forward that it would be much more difficult to try and create distance. Knowing she didn’t have much of a choice due to Zach’s furious assaults the sniper scope descended from the ceiling of the cockpit.

“Heh...thanks. I was hoping you’d do this.” Zach mumbled to himself while continued to close in on Blue Angel.

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The rail cannon quickly flipped over the metallic shoulder as it gathered energy around the pulsating barrel. To Heather's amazement the green lock on box slowly changed to a crimson tint as the box solidified around the nimble Hades. Just then the immense green beam fired out from the barrel jerking Blue Angel's torso back at an angle. As the MF jerked from the recoil the left arm flung to the side creating a small opening in her defenses. Zach smirked and continued to fire the plasma rifle. Heather's eyes widened as the plasma round exploded on the torso of her MF knocking Blue Angel into an uncontrollable free fall. As the MF spun in a twisting motion Hades' thrusters slightly moved 45 degrees to the right forcing the orange MF to sway to the side narrowly avoiding the attack.

"Come on Heather...regain control!" Adam screamed as she stared at the screen. Sharon placed her hand on his shoulder hoping to calm him down a bit.

"She's doing pretty well against that kid. He's quite the pilot." A soothing masculine voice suddenly emanated from behind Adam, Sharon and Stephen. Adam snickered as he turned around just as Gabriel approached. His blonde hair flowing in a state of eloquence that no other man was capable of displaying.

"What do you want?" Adam asked piercing the room with bitterness. He never liked Gabriel, it possibly had something to do with the fact that he was hitting on Sharon a few days prior.

"I apologize but both the lounge and the dome was packed I couldn't get in. So I figured that the MF hanger would have a good view of the match and wouldn't as crowded." Gabriel replied as he quickly glanced at Sharon.

Sharon blushed, and quickly turned around to watch the match.

"I see, don't get too comfortable. You are my next opponent after all." Adam replied.

"That I am...I am looking forward to our match." Gabriel replied with an eerie sense of a harmonious tone to his tongue.

A blinding crimson explosion flickered in the void of space quickly grabbing everyone's attention. Blue Angel fluttered out from the caliginous skies of smoke as did Hades both trailing with furious spheres of sparking electricity. Blue Angel's left arm was singed completely up until the elbow joint and from there on was nothing more than flinging wires. Heather began to panic to some extent as she knew there was no possible way for her to create a big enough distance between her and Hades, at this rate she would have to fight at close range something that Zach would have no problem doing. Hades sped towards Blue Angel with its metallic finger pulling the trigger to the plasma rifle, after each click of the trigger only an empty sound echoed through space. He cringed; through out the entire match he was trying to bombard Heather without paying attention to his ammunition reserves. Just as the plasma rifle was dropped from Hades' hand the orange MF was engulfed in a massive display of power. The force of the beam that managed to tear through the right arm sent Hades spiraling in the opposite direction. Heather smirked as smoke began to emanate slowly out of the rail cannons' barrel, this was her chance to create as much room as possible. Blue Angel turned around and began to back boost away from Hades, during the movement the right arm locked onto the fallen MF with the sniper rifle and began to fire. Each solid shell bounced off the orange armor while causing the radiator to work at an intense rate.

"Damn I wasn't expecting her to be this much trouble!" Zach screamed. Suddenly he felt sick, his hands let go of the throttle and he quickly grabbed onto his stomach. The swirling motion that his MF was moving at didn't help as the nausea continued to pound his organs. Sweat dripped down his body as his pilot suit became moist from all the sweat. Once again he found himself fading from consciousness, his emotions giving into his desire for victory. As his eyelids quivered his pupils began to fade to an eerie gradient of gray. Hades then quickly regained its stability and exploded out heading towards Blue Angel. The sudden shock of Hades' movement frightened Heather; her body seemed to freeze in position, her fingers trembling along the edges of the throttles.

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“Ah...the H-3 emerges once again...” The words mumbled out of Gabriel’s mouth. Neither Adam, Stephen or Sharon heard Gabriel speak they were too wrapped up in the match itself. Adam found himself leaning over the edge of the guard rail screaming for Heather to move out of the way, but it was too late. Hades suddenly zoomed past Blue Angel and at the last second swung its energy scythe. The searing beam of crimson energy sliced through the right arm. Heather was instantly thrown to the left side of the cockpit from the violent explosion that took her MF’s remaining arm. The attack didn’t end as Hades quickly turned around in order to slice the rail cannon into pieces. As the scythe tore through the elongated cannon Blue Angel dashed away to avoid the explosion to shattered the massive cannon. As the thick layers of smoke began to float indiscriminately Hades appeared deep within the torrents of smoke with a surrealistic crimson aura palpitating vibrantly around the MF.

Zach began to pant heavily as his lungs overhauled in order to keep him conscious. His pupils slowly returned to normal as the crimson aura slowly vanished from sight. Heather smiled as she gazed at the rotating Earth that was glistening in the abyss of shadows that was known as space.

“I lost...but; I tried my best guys...” Heather mumbled.

“Well that sucked...” Adam mumbled as he stood up from the guard rail.

“Did you honestly expect her to win?” Stephen asked glancing back at his brother.

“No, but I was hoping for an upset. She had me going for a bit, for a minute I actually thought she could have pulled this off.” Adam replied.

“She did a great job though!” Sharon cheerfully interrupted.

“I know...” Adam replied.

“That Zach is a great competitor.” Gabriel mentioned. Adam just glanced back at him for a second, his body language did the talking for him. Adam then wrapped his arm around Sharon’s shoulder and smiled.

“So what do you say? Lunch? Cause I’m starving!” Adam said loudly.

Sharon quietly nodded as they began to head out of the hanger. Gabriel just smiled and quickly made eye contact with Sharon.

“Dreams are key to understanding our existence...don’t forget that.” Gabriel said firmly. Sharon paused for a second while Adam ignored any words that seemed to fall out of Gabriel’s mouth.

“(Dreams...my existence...)” Sharon began to think to herself as she left the room.

Back on Mars the war continued to linger causing even more deaths that would pierce the heart of humanity. Revelations and their Eastern counter part Prodigy has caused the war to advance to a new level with their MF lines created specifically for the TA and the EAP. Battles were more chaotic causing even more destruction to the surrounding camps on Mars. The TA with their Shades and the EAP with their Night-Wings continued to engage one another in battle creating mass panic on Earth. With the advancing war rumors began to spread through out the public. Most began to fear that the war would soon spread to Earth and engulf the azure planet in a spiral of endless chaos and possibly bring about the end of the world. Red Fury managed to survive the growing dangerous battles as they continued to stick together. The South Western Territory has become a distant memory in the minds of humanity; now with the pressuring ideals of Vincent Avidus it has become nothing more than a war to dominate the other faction. And yet the Azure Cup remains a main factor in easing the minds of billions of people, it has become the Olympics of its time. No one wanted it to end; they wanted to remain in the blissful state of ignorance that the tournament seemed to emanate.

As the matches for the day continued to progress group ‘A’ had its final match as did group ‘B’, the results for the matches remained displayed on the massive LCD screen located in the center of the lounge.

Group ‘A’ Finals

Zach Orion V. Chris Procella

Group 'B' Finals

Mario Liberalis V. Nex

The excitement never seemed to cease, while the pilots and spectators celebrated Rebel stood in a secluded room with 4 other pilots who all sat quietly.

“You 4 have been chosen out of a group of over a 100 pilots to aide in the tribulation that humanity is preparing to face come the conclusion of the Azure Cup.” Rebel mentioned softly as he took a sip of his glass of Merlot. Each pilot remained quiet as they stared up at Rebel as he paced around the room.

“You see even though 3 out of the 4 of you have been eliminated from the tournament you still have proven yourselves worthy. During the remainder of the tournament you shall be training with your new MFs that have been specifically designed to your style of combat. War, Pestilence, Famine and Death, you will have the opportunity to usher in a new age of sinless behavior for humanity...take heed, the fate of the world is resting in your hands...” Rebel finished speaking taking a final sip of his wine. As he placed the crystalline glass down on the finely polished wooden table before him he began to chuckle. “I...I have accepted my dreams...my destiny...”

Chapter Twenty-Two: Resurrected Dreams of Regret

Adam tossed and turned in the comfort of his mattress, the azure sheets rustling as his body moved randomly. The confined hotel room echoed with the subtle sounds created by the conflict between Adam's body and the sheets on his mattress. Sharon's eyes stared towards Adam as he moved from side to side appearing to be in agony. His hair flung in the air sending out drops of water to fly out through the air, sweat ran down his face moving along the contours of his facial structure. She knew he was in pain; she clutched her hands together as they rested on top of her chest, there was nothing she could do that would cause his pain to disappear, it was something he would have to deal with on his own terms and conditions.

"You haven't forgotten about me have you? After all this time I haven't forgotten about you...." The soft delicate feminine voice repeated this line as it bounced in Adam's mind each time growing louder than the previous one.

"No...I could never forget you..." Adam replied as his dream continued on. Once again he found himself strapped in the familiar cockpit of his MF. Confused he quickly began to look out the display screens only to see a tempest of flames raging through the crumbled buildings of debris that scorched the ground of the barren land. He had no clue where he was or when, but he knew the soothing voice that was bellowing in his dreams; Amy Caecus. After all these years he was still carrying the burden of her death on his shoulders, even though he knew there was nothing that he could have done he still felt in his soul that he should have tried harder. He knew that with his current power that he'd be able to stop Chimera from killing her and that's when he realized. The crumbled buildings, the smell of burning metal drifting through the tainted air; he was back on the testing grounds for the TA military 2 years ago. However the key difference was that he remained his current age, he was 18 years old while holding onto his MF's throttles. He also noticed a blinking text on his display screen stating "Angel System Engaged." He smirked; he had the power he desired. Even though in the pit of his stomach he knew he was dreaming he refused to acknowledge it, he so desperately wanted to save her life.

He quickly turned his head glancing at the ground taking notice of the toppled behemoth machine that stormed in the middle of the test. Its four mechanical legs were waving in the sky as the machine tried to move off its fallen back. Everything was playing out the exact same way it did 2 years ago. Adam turned to face Alpha who he was expecting to float down to his right side.

"ADAM! We have to be extremely careful in what we do!" He heard Stephen shouting towards him just like he did back then. Adam smirked.

"I know! I won't let them die. Not again!" Adam screamed back to his dream induced brother.

Blue Dragon quickly began to speed towards the fallen machine with its azure wings beginning to extend outwards as the wind rushed passed the glistening metallic armor. Suddenly just as he expected a crimson blur sped towards his position. Before the crimson blur that he knew was Chimera could reach his position the eight azure wings quickly shot out from the back of Blue Dragon's torso. The orbital wings began to fire relentlessly onto Chimera causing the demonic MF to jump into defensive maneuvers.

"I don't have time to deal with you! I have to save her! I have to save Amy!" Adam screamed. Blue Dragon continued to approach the fallen defenseless machine and extended its right hand. The chrome metal fingers began to reach out as if trying to grasp the life he was trying to save. Then something unexpected happened, Blue Dragon was thrown to the side like a doll as a crimson beam of energy sliced through its right arm. Adam clutched on for dear life as his MF collapsed into fallen debris of a building. Hovering above Blue Dragon was a distorted Shadow, all Adam could here was the

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surrealistic laughter of Rebel echoing throughout the site which was then cut out by the torturous scream of Amy as her body began to burn in a sea of flames that now engulfed the machine.

Adam quickly jolted up from his mattress causing all of the sheets to stumble to the ground. As his blurred vision slowly began to focus on the reality of his environment he took notice of Sharon sitting at the edge of his bed in her bra and silk pink pants holding a glass of water. She stared at him with concern, he had been screaming out the entire night.

“Here drink this.” She calmly said.

“*huff* Thanks...” Adam replied taking hold of the glass.

“You still blame yourself for everything that’s happened?”

Adam glanced back at Sharon, his eyebrows remained motionless, he knew he couldn’t hide his emotions anymore especially from her.

“How’d you guess...”

“It’s not hard when you’re screaming “I won’t let them die again.”” Sharon mentioned as she moved closer to his quivering body.

“Heh...its funny you know. You think you’re forgiven, or at least that’s what you tell yourself, and the fact is there isn’t anyone around to give you that luxury of atonement. I’m going to have to live with this guilt for the rest of my life...”

“Adam...you couldn’t do anything. You know that, and beating yourself up about it won’t change the fact that they’re dead...like I can’t beat myself up because in the dead my father is still dead.” Tears began to form around the edges of her eyes, it was hard for her to discuss her father, but she knew that if she expected Adam to be strong that she would have to be strong as well otherwise she’d be a hypocrite.

“Sharon...”

“Don’t talk, for once in your life let me speak, you listen.” As she said this she leaned her body onto his. He ended up sitting against the wall behind his pillows while Sharon lay across his legs with her eyes gleaming up at his face. “I want you to stop fighting alone Adam, you have a bunch of people here who care for you and if you continue to try and fight this thing by yourself then you’ll continue to drown in guilt. No one expects the world of you; we only want you to remain yourself, the person we all care about. By acting cold around other pilots and by fighting with out mercy you’re only moving away from who you truly are. You’re a caring person; you’re not like that Rebel guy who is obviously trying to intimidate the rest of the competitors.”

“Sharon...”

“Please, just be yourself. And stop trying to fight your pain by yourself, at least share it with me.” She replied. Adam sighed looking away out the window as the sun began to become visible just stretching above the aura of the Earth. His hands began to caress her head while her lively brown hair flowed over his legs and the mattress.

“You’re right...” The words fumbled out of his mouth not sounding forced. Sharon smiled as she began to climb up to his face with her budding lips moving outwards just grazing against his own.

The matches for the day scheduled for section ‘C’ and ‘D’, the section finals were passing along smoothly. Shadow lingered outside of the space station while Rebel sat in his cockpit comfortably sitting with a glass of merlot placed on the side of his arm rest. He wasn’t sure when it happened exactly, but he had abruptly developed the taste for Merlot. He deduced that he might have acquired its taste from his constant meetings with Luscious but aside from that he wasn’t specifically sure where this came from, nor did it matter. He sighed as he noticed his opponent Colin now approaching his position. He placed the book that he was holding in his hands to the side.

“I apologize Sun Tzu; we will have to finish our engagement another time.” Rebel softly mumbled.

Colin was an EAP pilot, a lower ranked one but somehow managed to make it to the third round in the Azure Cup. His MF, Eternity as he called it was classified as a hover unit with a flat bottom in a

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circular structure equipped with a dozen thrusters. The torso of Eternity extended outwards to a soft round point while its arm units were blocky, rough and rigid, they didn't match the torso and leg's soft eloquent look. Both arms held onto hi-powered sniper rifles, his secondary weapon was a simple vertical missile pack. He also had an energy saber attached to the left shoulder of his unit but he barely ever got the chance to put it to good use. His green eyes trembled at the sight of Shadow, his pale skin continued to force out tears of sweat in order to cool his body down. It was a typical response for any pilot that ends up having to face the ominous Rebel358 in the heat of battle.

Ready?GO!

Colin managed to grab hold of the throttles; he took a final deep gulp of saliva as he prayed to make it out of the match unharmed. All of a sudden he drew a blank; he could no longer remember the elite training that he received when he was preparing to be an EAP pilot. The way his MF Eternity moved was equivalent of a bipedal tank; it was sluggish and lacked any sort of style or finesse.

Rebel chuckled under his breath. "Is there no pilot who can keep their composure when they face me? AM I DESTINED TO FIGHT WORTHLESS INSECTS?!" Rebel screamed, his frustration taking the better of his judgment. He knew he didn't need to be merciless in his battle; it would be over long before he could consider his methods merciless. Shadow's arms leaned forward as its right leg arched outwards while the thrusters pulsated sending the dark MF speeding towards Eternity. Colin's pupils dilated at first glance of the MF zooming towards him with the searing energy beam ignited in front of the torso. He quickly let go of the throttles placing his hands above his head in a natural instinctive response. Like all humans he covered his eyes in defense even though they were already protected by the helmet's visor. With a single stroke of its right arm Eternity's arms flung outwards and began to float lifelessly in the depth of space while Shadow continued onward. Colin remained in his cockpit, his legs vibrating rapidly, he tried to force them to stop moving but it was of no use, his nerves had taken over at this point. Shadow then began to descend towards Eternity one last time and with a quick slash destroyed the missile pack that rest between the MF's shoulders. With Colin curled in a scared fetal position the match was declared over with Rebel358 advancing to the group finals as every pilot expected.

Rebel sighed slowly picking up his book. The book was ancient; its pages were a dull yellow with tears at almost every angle.

"Well then Mr. Tzu, where were we?" Rebel's voice echoed onwards as Eternity floating singed from the beating that it had just received.

"Heh, so Rebel advanced again?" Adam mumbled.

Stephen nodded as he leaned forward over the guard rail in the MF hanger.

"I told you he's going to be in the finals." Stephen replied.

"Ha! Let that fool make it to the finals, one of us will finish him off!" Mario exclaimed from Adam's left side while Stephen remained on Adam's right.

"You idiot, if you go any farther you'll be the first to face him since your in Section 'B'. Me and Adam would have to wait until the finals." Stephen replied.

"Oh...yeah, good point."

"Haha...so..." Adam mumbled trying to prevent one of those awkward filled silences to take control of the room.

"So..." Mario replied not helping.

"I heard the war has escalated to a chaotic point." Stephen replied as he stared at the mechanics who were working on his MF, Alpha.

"Really...that's too bad. I'd had hoped that without MFs that the war would quiet down." Adam replied.

"Well Vincent Avidus had something to say about that." Stephen replied.

"Vincent...Avidus? Whose that?" Mario mumbled.

Adam sighed and began to walk away from both Mario and Stephen.

“He’s the head of Revelations. I heard about him a year ago, he believes that everyone in the EAP needs to be conquered. He’s a firm believer in imperialism.” Adam replied.

“Oh...so what did he do that’s making this war so much worse?” Mario asked as he glanced back towards Stephen.

“He’s created a unique line of MFs directly for the TA. No longer are pilots allowed to customize their own unit, he’s single handedly created an army of MFs.” Stephen replied.

“That bastard...why can’t people just let all of this end?” Adam continued to walk towards the vending machine leaning up against the wall.

“When either side is completely wiped out...that’s when.” Stephen mumbled. He took a deep breath and turned around smiling. “That is of course if we don’t prevent that from happening.”

“Huh? What are you talking about...ooooh, wait a minute. I’ve seen that look on your face before. You’re planning something dangerous aren’t you?” Mario exclaimed.

“I have my ideas. Don’t worry about it just yet; we’ll deal with one thing at a time, first this tournament and then the war.” Stephen replied.

“Heh, glad to hear it bro...” Adam replied. “What’s wrong...?” Adam mumbled as he saw both Stephen and Mario gawking in his direction. He shrugged his shoulders and slowly turned around while opening a can of soda. The crimson can was shaken too much as it unleashed a wild spray of soda that continued to shoot out all over Adam’s face and shirt until the CO2 began to ease down. The can dropped to the frigid ground as Adam joined his brother and friend in staring with a blank expression. His heart began to pulse at tremendous and irregular speeds. There standing in the door way was an alluring woman, she was the essence of perfection, her shoulder length blossoming mahogany hair floating through the air conditioning of the hanger, her hazel eyes glistened at Adam. Adam began to stumble as both Stephen and Mario quickly walked to his side.

“Adam...Adam Novus is that really you?” Her voice was glazed with a sense of familiarity and innocence that just pierced Adam’s heart. He stared at her constantly muttering the words “impossible” over and over again as if it would somehow alter the current situation.

“It...it can’t be.....Amy.....” His voice transcended through the hanger as he nearly passed out from the shock.

Chapter Twenty-Three: Sins of the Soul

It didn’t seem real at the moment, he felt like he was still stuck in some surrealistic nightmare. Adam continued to stare blankly at the aura of radiance that stood before him. Her slightly tanned skin and her innocent looking expression stared back at him smiling like nothing was wrong. This face that was now before him had constantly haunted his dreams every night for the past 2 years. And now she stood physically intact right before him as eloquent as ever. Confused Adam looked over to his brother hoping that he would have a logical or at least a rational explanation for her appearance. Stephen just

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shrugged his shoulders, he too was confused to say the very least. A chill swept through his body as her soft ghostly hand grazed the left side of his cheek.

"I've been searching for you and now I've finally found you..." She mumbled. Adam backed away from the phantom of Amy Caecus that now stood next to him.

"No...it's not possible. I saw you die..."

"If I died would I be standing right here?"

"..."

"She's got you there bro." Mario interrupted. Adam turned fiercely towards his energetic friend. "You're not helping." He replied.

"Adam...you don't believe me..."

"I...we, we saw that machine explode....there was no possible way you could have survived it..."

"I know the odds were against me...but my father, my father sacrificed himself so that I could live on...to carry out his ideals." Amy replied as she once again began to caress Adam's shocked face. He knew it wasn't right, to enjoy her presence, in a way he felt as if this would be his atonement for his sins. A second chance no matter how unlikely the situation might have been.

"I..."

"They never found my body correct?" Amy questioned glancing over at Stephen. It didn't strike him until then, that the Government indeed did not find any of their remains after the exam. They determined that the explosion annihilated their bodies completely leaving no physical remains, so there was a loop hole in the supposed deaths of Harold and Amy Caecus, but he still felt as if this wasn't completely on the level.

"I didn't think so; you have to admit that it is possible. Or do you not want me to be around?" Amy questioned her tone changing to a tearful one; she stared up at Adam, her eyes wide and innocent. Adam sighed; there were hundreds of thoughts running through his confused mind. On one end he had Amy, a girl who represented years of guilt pent up inside his soul while on the other hand he has Sharon, a girl who represented hope and love. This Amy made a convincing argument for a few seconds, he started to even believe that it was possible that she was alive but one thing bothered him, swelling up in the back of his mind. This Amy looked exactly like the Amy he knew, in fact too much like her; she still had the youthful look of a 16 year old.

"Amy....things have happened during your absence....I mean..."

"You met someone else....that's expected and I understand." She replied.

"Huh? Wait what? You understand?" Her sullen voice, calm and sweet put him into another state of shock. He didn't expect her to just leave because he met someone else, not after she came all this way to Prosperity to find him.

"Yeah, you were obviously in a state of distress and just latched onto the first girl that gave you a shoulder to cry on. She can't possibly mean more to you than I do..."

Mario began to chuckle trying to hold himself from completely bursting out in a spray of laughter.

"Oh wow....she did not just say that! Hahaha, yo Stephen did she just say that? Hahaha."

Adam once again turned to face his jester of a friend. "Seriously, shut up for a minute."

"Oops, sorry bro." Mario replied as he began to scratch the back of his head.

"Listen...Amy, Sharon means a lot to me...it is true that I had feelings for you 2 years ago, but to be completely honest I barely even knew you. I was a boy with a crush..." Adam replied reluctantly. She just smiled like his comment didn't even phase her soul in the least. She walked up to him and gently kissed him on the cheek and winked her right eye in his direction. Adam took a gulp of his saliva while he stared at Amy, not even trying to prevent her from embracing him. Her arms soon wrapped around his body as she hugged him tightly.

"You're so silly. I know how you really feel about me. You're just confused right now and that's to be expected. I'll tell you what, this is my cell, give me a call when you come to your senses." She

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handed him a white business card with her number written on the back. She smiled one more time and began to walk out of the hanger leaving Adam staring at the card blankly.

“Whoa...what was that all about?” Mario asked.

“That...that was Amy Caecus...someone close to me who should have died in my first encounter with the Chimera.” Adam replied as he flipped over the small card. His eyes widened as he saw in bold letters forest green letters.

“So you actually believe that it’s really her? Please tell me you’re not that gullible.” Stephen replied.

“No...it’s not her. But I’ll say this much, I couldn’t be any happier that she showed up.” Adam replied as he handed the business card to his brother. As Stephen’s fingers close around the edges of the card he began to smirk.

“Genesis Department of Genetic Research...she pretty much just handed us our first clue...” Stephen mumbled.

“Wait I’m sorry but I’m not following.” Mario replied.

“Its simple...Genesis is developing their own artificially created humans. Clones if you will, saw them with my own eyes a month or so ago.” Adam replied.

“Clones? So you’re telling me that Genesis is going around cloning people? For what purpose? Sorry guys but that just sounds so far fetched.”

“Believe me or not, they’re still doing it. And I’m pretty sure that that Amy is one of them. Now the question is why would they clone her?” Adam mumbled as he began to look at his stained shirt.

“If they’ve cloned her it’s possible that they’re trying to manipulate you.” Stephen mentioned.

“Yeah...I kinda figured as much. Caleb told me something before Rebel killed him...he said that Luscious believes I’m the key...”

“Key? Key to what?” Mario asked.

“I’m not too sure...that’s what I need to find out. It’s possible that this entire tournament is just to get me within his grasp, hell all of the pilots who have no affiliation with either the TA or the EAP could just be artificially composed humans. If that’s the case then that would make us the minority and completely out numbered.” Adam replied.

“I see...what about Rebel358 then?” Mario continued to ask the questions while Stephen remained staring at the business card.

“Not sure how he fits into all of this, I’m not even sure what it is we’re all apart of right now. All I know is that Genesis is doing something behind the world’s back. And I firmly believe this tournament is apart of it.” Adam replied.

“Looks like we’re going to have to be careful then.”

“You could say that...Stephen what do you think?” Adam asked glancing over to his brother.

“Oh...I’m not entirely sure right now. I think our best bet would be to finish the tournament and take things from there. Also I think we should keep this Amy under surveillance. You never know what might happen.” Stephen replied.

“Agreed. Adam?”

“You guys figure it out. I have a match in a few minutes.” Adam replied.

“Oh yeah haha, I forgot. You’re facing off against that Gabriel guy right? The one whose been flirting with Sharon.” Mario replied.

“Yep...at least I’ll be able to enjoy myself for a little bit.”

“I see. Anyway I’ll tell Ashley to keep an eye on her.” Stephen replied.

“Ashley huh. So are you going to ever tell us what’s going on with you two?” Adam asked as he nudged Stephen’s rib cage.

“Nothing you two need to be aware of. Now get ready for your match we have some things to get done.” Stephen replied.

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Gabriel reclined in the cockpit of his mid weight bipedal MF, Necron. Two thin elongated horns extended outwards from the spherical shoulder units. Its thinly armored arm units held onto two energy rifles while two long sharp blades protruded out from the lower half of the arms. Gabriel considered himself a close range combatant and made sure his MF was equipped to reflect that trait. He figured he had no need for missiles or any type of cannon and left four energy sabers dangling from the back of his MF. His mind began to wander thinking of his own nightmares that have been disturbing his soul for the past few weeks. His body began to quiver at the sheer thought of his nightmares, they were disturbing enough to ruin his sleep he didn't need them to ruin his mood now. He glanced to the side of his cockpit staring at a assortment of pictures. Most of the torn and withered images were of his parents, both were wearing long ivory lab coats. In every picture he was in the same room with his two parents, hundreds of cylindrical tubes making up the background along with dozens of dangling wires all hanging from a ceiling at that could not be seen by the human eye because of all the darkness that engulfed the room.

"I'll do it for you mom and dad...I'll win the tournament and prove to be the best pilot ever!" Gabriel softly spoke while his hand began to shake as it held onto a image of himself holding the hand of a younger girl smiling. Her own light and dark brown hair flowing to her shoulders while his blonde hair followed the same route on his own body. The two appeared to be extremely happy; he smiled at the thought and hopes of reuniting with the girl from his past.

"Its time..." Gabriel mumbled under his breath as he saw the message on his display screen telling him that the match was about to start. He knew he couldn't properly prepare for the obstacle that was now standing before him; he could only hope that he would be able to win. The golden boosters began to hum softly as the flickering flame of yellow energy began to burn brightly. His feet pivoted downwards onto the accelerator causing the MF to slowly move. The burning spirit that drove his eyes focused on the outer limits of space, this was everything had been waiting for.

"Necron...heading out." And with a violent display of power the golden MF launched out of the hanger taking to the abyss of space. "I won't lose...I can't lose."

Adam too was thinking the same exact thought as Blue Dragon headed out towards the comfort of space. With the recent appearance of a female who bared a strong resemblance to Amy Caecus it would be difficult to say that he wasn't affected; that his mind wasn't wandering off on its own tangents of hope. Part of him hoped that she was in fact the real deal, and not some cloned human composed from Genesis' labs hidden deep beneath the deceit of the world. He stared out towards the rotating Earth as it continued its path around the blazing sun. He smirked at the abrupt appearance of his opponent Gabriel. The golden MF quickly sped to the opposite end of the arena specified for the current match.

"I'm impressed you actually decided to show up." Adam said breaking the monotony.

"Heh, don't concern yourself with me. I'd worry about your own well being Azure Knight." Gabriel pronounced. Adam chuckled at the sound of "Azure Knight" it was his military tag name; he didn't find it appropriate to call himself by that name since this wasn't a military event.

"Azure Knight...haha. I'm beginning to despise that name." Adam replied.

"I see...then I'll just call you Adam."

"Adam's fine, not that it matters much. Not in a battle for advancement!" Adam yelled back.

"That may be true. But I like to talk during my matches, I've noticed that it takes away the strain from intense battles" Gabriel replied.

"Heh, I'll admit, you're a weird one." Adam said while looking at the descending numbers on the side of his display screen.

"Well then, it appears that it is about that time for us to engage in combat. I wish you luck....may the best pilot win." Gabriel replied. He slid down the visor on his helmet and clutched the throttles at his side.

"Yeah..." Adam replied.

Ready? GO!

To Adam's surprise Gabriel wasn't as calm and predictable as he thought. Necron quickly burst out of its starting position while firing both energy rifles at Blue Dragon. Adam smirked as he took hold of the throttles and began to jump into evasive maneuvers. Crimson beams of energy shot past the sides of Blue Dragon coming closer to contact with each round. Blue Dragon continued to dazzle audiences by flying on its sides while managing to avoid the attacks being fired. Gabriel could only smile at the agility of his opponent.

"Good, I was hoping this would be a challenge!" Gabriel screamed. The boosters flared violently as Necron exploded with speed never seen before in its earlier matches. The abrupt transition in speed even caught Adam by surprise. Within seconds Necron appeared next to the blue MF swinging its left leg. Adam cringed and quickly dodged the attack, as Blue Dragon swayed to the left both its own laser rifles fired rapidly. The cerulean energy beams shot towards Necron but Gabriel managed to fly on its right side avoiding the blasts. As Necron dashed to the side during its dodging maneuvers Blue Dragon sped towards the golden MF quickly ignited its energy sabers.

"Heh..." Gabriel mumbled. Just as Blue Dragon began to swing its arms Necron side stepped away causing Adam to speed past leaving the back of his MF open to attack. A quick tingling sensation shot through Gabriel's mind, his hands moved the throttles to his side with grace and little struggle forcing Necron to slash with its own energy sabers. The searing beam of crimson energy began to descend towards Blue Dragon's wings and it appeared as if it was going to connect. Adam smirked as the eight azure wings quickly dispersed from the torso, the resulting energy that now flowed out from the back of Blue Dragon's torso exploded in the face of Necron causing it to stumble backwards a bit. Adam then quickly turned his MF around and slashed at the core of Necron sending it flying away from him at tremendous velocity. Blue Dragon began to fly towards Necron as the wings reattached themselves to the back of the torso.

Gabriel began to laugh with tears of joy. He had never experienced such a rush as he was at this moment.

"Excellent! This is exactly what I was expecting it to be and more!" Gabriel screamed as he managed to stabilize Necron's movements. The energy saber began to float in the space as the golden MF equipped the dual energy rifles and began to fire them one after another. With each round that was fired the arms jerked backwards from the heavy recoil. Adam smiled as he headed straight towards the torrent of energy beams. Blue Dragon flew gracefully around a few of the beams and then began to slash the others with the energy sabers sending them back towards Necron. Gabriel's eyes widened in shock but managed to avoid the oncoming beams. Just then Blue Dragon tackled into Necron forcefully. As the two MFs struggled through the depths of space every man, woman and child stood in suspense.

"I'm impressed Adam, this you're much stronger than I had originally anticipated." Gabriel spoke.

"Thanks, you're not so bad yourself."

"It is a pity though that this will not be enough..." Gabriel began to somberly say.

"What? Heh, still think you have a shot huh?" Adam questioned. Blue Dragon quickly responded to his commands as it slashed upwards with the left handed energy saber now creating a massive gash on the front torso of Necron in the form of an "x". Gabriel was thrown forward into his display screen, as his body was tossed the materials composing the restraints began to snap. As the restraints broke Gabriel's entire body was flung forward, his dull yellow helmet crashed into the LCD screen sending an uproar of plastic shards flying in his cockpit. His visor cracked from the brunt of the collision, Gabriel shook it off and then took off his helmet. It was no good to him now in its condition, it would only hinder his sight.

"Maybe you are the key to humanity's survival." Gabriel muttered

"What?!" Adam leaned out of his seat in confusion; he had heard the word "key" before specifically coming out of Caleb's mouth. As Adam stared in confusion Necron attacked. The right arm swung down with the energy saber, the beam of fused compacted energy slowly approached Blue Dragon, but Adam swayed to the right to avoid the attack. Just as the blue MF avoided the blow it was struck by

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the metallic blade attached to Necron's left arm. The glistening blade tore through the outer layer of armor that was compacted onto Blue Dragon's right shoulder. Adam quickly pulled the throttles inward in order to move away before the blade did any more damage. As Blue Dragon pulled away the two thigh cannons lifted upwards and fired at point blank range. The two beams of energy collided onto the core of Necron, the ferocity of the blast knocked Necron away.

"You are indeed strong, but strength alone will not save humanity from its sins!" Gabriel screamed.

"What? Its sins? Who the hell are you to judge humanity!" Adam screamed back.

"I...I HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO JUDGE! I AM A PRODUCT OF THEIR SINS!" Gabriel screamed back at Adam while swinging both of Necron's arms. Blue Dragon avoided the attacks and swung its own arms but missed when Necron boosted upwards. Adam cringed as he glanced above him but it was too late, Necron's boosters pulsed intensely and as the gold MF side kicked Blue Dragon's head unit. The blue MF fumbled over spinning around after the blow.

"What are you saying?!"

"I was created by man, a man trying to take the place of God! I am the product of sin!" Gabriel screamed. As his emotions flared his performance skills increased.

"You...you're a clone?..." Adam mumbled as his eyes widened, Necron was speeding towards him.

"Call me whatever you wish! I don't have much longer to live! I need to atone for the sins that I was born with!" Gabriel screamed.

"..." Adam couldn't speak; there wasn't much for him to say. He was face to face with one of Genesis' clones. Necron began to pound fiercely onto Blue Dragon, with each hit pieces of azure armor flung outwards into space singed from burning sparks of electrical torrents.

"ADAM!" Sharon screamed as she motioned towards him. Her arms flung out into the air trying to grab hold of him even though she knew it wasn't possible. Stephen grabbed onto her holding her back but she continued to struggle.

"There's nothing you can do..." Stephen mumbled. Sharon quickly jerked her head around glaring at Stephen with tears budding out from her eyes. She hated to see Adam suffer especially when she knew there was nothing she could do to help him.

"You can't just expect me to stay here and watch this!" Sharon screamed.

"You have too...if you trust him then you know he'll pull through." Stephen replied. Trust was something she did have with Adam; she knew that Stephen was right. All she could do now was wait out the match.

Adam's eyes widened, he could have sworn hearing Sharon's voice trying to lift his spirits.

"I apologize Adam but I can not let you stand in my way...I have to win. It is my destiny, my purpose in life to erase the sin from humanity. It is all I can offer after being born due to sinful desires." Gabriel muttered. Both of Necron's arms crossed over each other with both metallic blades protruding downwards. As Necron's arms quickly began to fall towards Blue Dragon the eight wings quickly launched ferociously. Gabriel's eyes instinctively began to follow the orbital wings' movements. Blue Dragon's right leg quickly swept through Necron's legs causing the MF to flip sideways. While Necron struggled to regain its stability each wing began to pound onto the MF with a barrage of energy beams. Necron then continued to be flung violently around from each blast. Smoke began to emanate off of the singed armor but Necron remained active. Adam realizing Blue Dragon's energy bar was closing in on the critical point quickly called back the wings. The azure wings docked back onto the torso of Blue Dragon while Necron managed to recover.

"I WON'T LOSE! I CAN'T LOSE!" Gabriel screamed. It appeared that this would be Necron's final attack.

“Neither can I...you’ve managed to get the best of me while my Angel System has been engaged...heh, I guess I have no choice...” Adam said to himself softly as he flipped the switch to his side. Instantly the gravitational forces that are usually strenuous from the Angel System increased dramatically.

Angel System...EX mode engaged...

Adam smirked, he wasn’t yet used to this strain but he knew that this battle was as good a time as any to try it out. Adam quickly flung the throttle to his side while stepping hard onto the accelerator. There was no response time due to the EX system, Blue Dragon responded with every movement and action that Adam commanded. Both MFs jostled towards one another Blue Dragon quickly spun around on its side just as it passed Necron. Just then Gabriel passed by Blue Dragon only for both of its golden arms to exploded into flames quickly. Blue Dragon stopped its movement as Adam quickly disengaged the Angel System and began to breathe heavily. Gabriel too was exhausted and now clutching onto his chest. He knew it was over even though he didn’t want to admit it; his Necron was useless without its arms.

“*Cough*...the sins of the soul are dangerous to the existence of humans...*cough*... please remember that...”

“Gabriel...”

“*cough* I am pleased though...*cough*...I believe that you will be able to correct the sins of humanity...*cough* there are those who feel that all of human existence needs to be extinguished in order to for sin to be erased...*cough*...that isn’t the correct path either...not if it creates...*cough* sinful creatures such...*cough*...such as myse...” Gabriel coughed one final time with his head jerking outwards towards the shattered LCD screen, his crimson blood spurt out of his quivering frigid lips while his eye lids slowly shut encasing him in the shadows of his own existence.

Adam just stared out into space at the golden MF that was now not moving at all. His communications radio was now only picking up static. He knew instantly what had happened.

“Damn you...you...you didn’t have to die...even if you were created out of sin, you still were one of the purist humans I’ve ever had the pleasure in meeting...I won’t let your existence be in vein...” Adam said softly, he then began to stare out onto the abyss of darkness that surrounded his own existence.

Chapter Twenty-Four: Prelude to Terror

The days went by as the sullen atmosphere continued to fill the rooms of most of the pilots on Prosperity. Gabriel’s abrupt and unknown cause of death had swept through out the living quarters instilling concern and fear. No one knew what truly happened to Gabriel during his match with Adam Novus a few days prior and most were content with not knowing. Adam knew the truth, that Gabriel was one of the clones created by Genesis, and for the first time he was able to uncover some insight onto what Genesis was doing. Although he felt that the information was too vague to be meaningful he still knew it was a start. Adam and Sharon stood before the lounge staring at the results of the section finals for the past few days.

“Are you ok? You’ve been really quiet lately.” Sharon said breaking the silence. It was true, there was a lot on his mind all starting with the appearance of what he thought to be the clone of Amy Caecus.

“A few things...nothing too drastic. I’ll be fine.” Adam replied.

“You know...I heard about Amy.” Sharon was reluctant at first to even mention her name but she knew that it was what was eating him up inside. Adam smiled wrapping his right arm around Sharon pulling her closer.

“That person isn’t Amy...she is just like Gabriel. An artificial life form.”

“That maybe true, but she’s still the physical representation of your regret. And that’s what is worrying me. Are you sure you’re alright?”

“Yeah...since you’re with me I’m fine.”

They both hugged tightly as the screen lit up with the results so far.

'E-1'

Adam Novus

Adam Novus

Gabriel Calquez

'E-2'

Gluttony

Serenity

Serenity

'F-1'

Clark

Silhouette

Silhouette

'F-2'

Diavolo

Diavolo

Mike

'H-1'

Nick

Mal Tiempo

Mal Tiempo

'H-2'

Seina

Seina

Destiny

'I-1'

Stephen

Stephen

Alex

'I-2'

Tony

Seriph

Seriph

The section finals had come to an end leaving only 16 pilots in the running for the status of number one MF pilot.

“So it is slowly coming to an end huh?” Sharon mumbled.

“Yeah, that it is. We’re getting closer, only a few more weeks until we can all go home.” Adam replied as they both walked towards the barren pallid corridor.

“Are you going home after the conclusion of the tournament?”

“I think home could do me well...”

“So you’re going to just forget about the war and your duty as a military officer?”

“I wish I could...I’m just going to take a break from the action is all.” Adam replied.

As they continued to walk through the quiet empty hallways they remained quiet just being able to enjoy the serenity of silence is a gift that not many get the chance to indulge in.

“Adam Novus...” A familiar strong voice disrupted that silence far off in the distance. Adam smirked as Leo Ombra made his way out of the shadows that was hiding his physical appearance.

“It’s you....”

“Yeah...I think we should talk.” Leo replied.

“Have your memories returned then?”

“Not really....but still I think we should talk.” Leo replied.

Sharon just stared at both Adam and Leo only to shrug her shoulders.

“Ugh, fine. I’ll go find Ashley and Heather while you two have your talk. Give me a call when you’re done.” Sharon replied.

Adam simply nodded as he followed Leo into what he believed to be his quarters. Upon entering the dismal living space Adam stumbled as every wall was filled with images and newspaper articles from the past 2 years.

“Quite the collection you’ve got going.” Adam mentioned as he walked along side the contours of the walls gazing at the images of Leo and his MF. One image caught his attention in contrast to the rest, Leo stood in front of a group of men, and one of the men Adam recognized to be the late Caleb Prodito.

“I thought you said you didn’t know Caleb...” Leo just glanced back at Adam with a cold sarcastic expression. “Oh right, your memories...”

“*sigh* After you left a man came into my room late that night. He said to not concern myself with the past...”

“I see...who was it? If you don’t mind me asking that is.”

“He said his name was Luscious Malum...” Leo replied.

Suddenly a sharp chill spread throughout Adam’s body, even though in his gut he was expecting that person to be Luscious. A nearby chair held Adam’s body as he sat down leaning over the edge of a plastic chrome table.

“I see....so Luscious stopped in to check on you in person. That means Genesis was the ones who murdered my friends, or at least called in the order..”

“Genesis? What are you suggesting?!”

“*sigh*, I’m suggesting that you might have been one of the men who was ordered to carry out that task.” Adam replied.

“....”

“Heh, your facial expression doesn’t seem to be too surprised by my accusations.”

Leo began to walk over to his bed which was a mess, blankets and sheets were ruffled up and hanging off the side while pillows were situated on the dirt filled carpet.

“It is true that I don’t remember what happened 2 years ago....but I keep having these dreams. These horrible disturbing dreams.” Leo mumbled.

“Dreams....we all have dreams.” Adam replied.

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“Dreams are the key to understanding our existence....or at least that’s what I’ve been told.” Leo replied.

“Heh...I’ve heard that before from someone else. My dreams show me nothing but sorrow and are a constant reminder of my sins...” Adam replied.

“We all bare sin Adam. It’s how we deal with it that makes us all different.” Leo replied.

“Heh....you’re a philosopher now huh?”

“No....I’m not sure where but I’ve heard those lines before. Someone spoke them to me, I feel like some of my memories are leaking back into me but right now they’re nothing more than pieces to a puzzle all thrown in separate boxes.” Leo replied.

“I see...so why the sudden interest in wanting to talk with me?”

“I saw your match with Gabriel....I want to know what happened to him....I know what Genesis told the media is false.” Leo replied.

Adam glanced away from Leo’s brooding presence, his eyes drifted to the floor soon taking notice of a golden bracelet. It was pale in showing signs of age, but the charms were what became interesting. There were small heart shaped charms all with inscriptions; however the majority of the inscriptions were hard to interpret due to dull colored crimson stains covering each charm. And yet the charm still felt familiar to Adam, it struck him in a way that his own dreams would strike at his soul.

“Umm...” Adam couldn’t configure his sentence; he was too taken by the bracelet that was left recklessly on the carpet. Leo’s hazel eyes focused in on the charm bracelet.

“Oh, I don’t remember where I picked that up but I figured it was something special. Maybe handed down to me by my grand parents, I’m not sure.” As he said this he took hold of the golden bracelet and handed it over to Adam. Once the bracelet fell into the palm of Adam’s quivering hands he began to inspect each charm thoroughly only to find his instincts correct. His head slowly rose and his eyes remained fixated onto Leo’s face. Adam’s hands began to conform into a fist and began to shake excessively.

“You ok?” Leo asked.

Adam stood up from the chair with a half cocked smirk lighting his face.

“This charm bracelet.....it belonged.....it belonged to a friend of mine...Christina Effloresco....” The words penetrated out from his lips slowly and in fragments. His emotions were beginning to take control of his speech and of his own actions. Leo became over run by a state of shock, his heart began to race while sweat dripped out from his pores.

“I...are....are you sure?”

“I am sure....each charm, written in script is our names one on each charm...I’m taking this.” Adam said firmly. His tone of voice deepened, it just stared at Leo for a good 5 minutes unsure of what course of action he would take. Part of him wanted to take Leo’s life there, but he knew in the pit of his stomach it wouldn’t bring any of his friends back.

The blustering sound of a cell phone broke the monotony and awkwardness of the moment. Adam tried to ignore the cerulean glow that was emanating out of his denim pockets but it refused to stop ringing. He sighed reaching into his pocket, as he flipped his phone open he realized that it was Amy. All of his anger soon began to dissipate, clone or not, she was like Sharon said the physical representation of all of his guilt and suffering.

“Hello...” Adam muttered.

“HEY! Listen are you busy right now?”

“Actually I...”

“Great! Stop what you’re doing and meet me in the lounge! We have a lot to catch up on! Don’t be late!” Amy bellowed in a cheery tone of voice. That was another thing that he found disturbing, he couldn’t remember if Amy was ever as bubbly as she was being perceived as now. Adam sighed looking at Leo one last time only to storm out the door with the bracelet firmly clutched in between his palm and the tips of his fingers.

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Anthony yawned widely as the night loomed over their heads at Evo.

“Still can’t sleep?” Eric asked while staring at the indentation of the mattress above his head.

Anthony rolled onto his side rolling his eyes. “Not at all. This war is really getting out of hand now.” He replied.

“I know...and now that every TA base is equipped with their own line of Shades it seems as if we’re going to be left in the dust without a job once again.” Eric replied.

“That Vincent Avidus...man who the hell does he think he is?”

“It’s simple; he’s the new commander and chief.” Eric replied sarcastically.

“I’m serious; he’s nothing more than a spoiled rich kid playing around with the lively hoods of innocent people like their nothing more than dolls!” Anthony blared on.

“Eh, that may be true. But as long as he’s funding the TA then he can do whatever he pleases. I wouldn’t be surprised if he decides to just drop a nuke on the EAP and end the war in one single move.”

“A nuke? Do you really think he’d take it that far?”

“It’s possible. If things don’t work out the way he wants it to anyway.”

“Damn that bastard...this war is just destroying the purity of Mars.”

“So what do you suggest we do Anthony? Move the war to Earth and stay on Mars to protect it from becoming tainted? Hahaha.” Eric began to laugh as he rolled in his sheets.

“Yeah laugh it up now fly boy. Eventually you’ll realize that I’m right about Mars being the future for humanity. We can’t let them destroy this planet before it’s been properly colonized.” Anthony replied.

“Hehe, you might have a point. But I don’t think 2 people are going to be able to protect Mars from much.”

“Of course not...I’m sure there are plenty of people against the war. We work silently behind the war to gather enough soldiers to join our cause. Think about it, within a few years we may have enough soldiers to break away from the military and call Mars our own!”

“You’re a dreamer you know that buddy.”

“Hey I maybe a dreamer but at least I’m trying to come up with a solution while you’re down there twiddling your thumbs doing nothing but following orders.”

“Heheh, I like following orders. I don’t want to deal with the important decisions. I’m perfectly fine with attacking what I’m pointed to.”

“So you have no quarrels with this war then?”

“Ugh...of course I have issues with the war. It’s turning into a war revolving around Genocide.”

“Then why not break away and work to protect Mars.”

“Anthony, that’s an idealistic idea. If we did that then we’d have to fight both the EAP and the TA and I hate to break it to you, but we’re only air force pilots. We’d have to fight against MFs and BXTs and ATs, we just wouldn’t stand a chance. Just go to sleep man.” Eric replied as he threw the covers over his face.

“Fine...(but you’ll see... you’ll all see one day...)”

Washington D.C. the home to the TA main headquarters as well as Revelation’s base of operations. Vincent Avidus smiled as he sat at the front of an elongated obsidian desk with the other founders of Revelations in addition to the President of the United States also known as the head of the TA, Albert Lengrin. He was an aging man around 70 years; his skin was filled with wrinkles and dark spots.

“Mr. Avidus why is it that you have requested our presence?” The aging president began to mumble. The sound of his voice promoted death and pain; he was at the end of his life span.

Vincent Avidus smirked as the lights in the room began to dim allowing the LCD screen in the front to display images clearly. What everyone began to look at was a massive spherical structure that was orbiting just in between the Earth’s orbit and the orbit of the moon.

“What is that?! I have never seen such a thing before!” The president exclaimed.

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“That Mr. President is the EAP’s latest incarnation, Independence. It’s a satellite cannon that has the ability to hit any city on both Earth and Mars.”

“A satellite cannon? How...how long has that been up there?”

“About a year sir. That is why I have to suggest that we deal with this as soon as possible.”

“Mr. Avidus...how would you propose we handle the situation?”

“Heh...that’s simple, hand over the control of the TA to Revelations and we will take care of the EAP.” Vincent replied.

Every board member in the room began to stare at the president; they all knew that they already had a significant amount of authority in the TA’s actions since they funded the development of their weapons. They believed that this would just seal the deal and was the correct decision to make.

“Mr. President, if I may, we do finance everything the TA does already. This is for the best I assure you.” Vincent replied with a grin.

“I...I’m not sure...”

“Mr. President ...no offense but your methods have not shown positive results. The TA is at a stalemate when it comes to the EAP.”

“And just how will your methods differ Mr. Avidus?”

“I’m glad you asked.”

Just then a new image took the screen. It was a of a single Shade unit, with its block-like leg units and square torso. However in between its right arm and its torso was a massive elongated launcher.

“And what is this supposed to be Mr. Avidus?”

“It’s simple. Our newest key to winning the war. We have tried it your way Mr. President but the EAP remains and at this very moment prepping a cannon in space to attack us. We have no choice anymore Mr. President.” Vincent replied.

“You...you’re not possibly suggesting...” His voice began to fade from the shock.

“Just sign over TA control to Revelations and you won’t have to worry about a thing.” Vincent replied.

The President’s grey eyes were glazed over with fear, his hand trembled as it held onto a ball point pen. The tip of the pen began to come in contact with the ivory sheet of paper below his fingers. A few strokes from his wrist and the President signed over the Trinity Alliance to Revelations. Vincent smiled nodding towards the President.

“You’ve made the right decision Mr. President.”

“Have I?...may God have mercy on all of our souls...”

“I believe you have it wrong Mr. President. May God have mercy on the souls of the EAP. After all we’re going to be sending him a shuttle load of new arrivals.”

Chapter Twenty-Five: Wheel of Destiny

Hades soared to the right in order to dodge a volley of chrome rockets. The heavily damaging rockets blazed passed the orange MF just as its arms lifted upwards in a dodging maneuver.

“Damn just missed him. You are a quick one aren’t you?” Chris screamed out as the FCS in Tempest continually tried to lock onto Hades.

Zach smiled as he turned Hades around with the dual plasma rifle quivering to get a lock onto Tempest as well. The entire match had been highly entertaining, captivating all audiences around the world. Both Chris and Zach appeared to be evenly matched, avoiding each others’ attacks nimbly and without much effort. It seemed that Zach had managed to overcome his own nerves, throughout the match he had yet to find himself stuck in a corner struggling to find a way out. Suddenly Zach jerked his throttles to the side as Tempest zoomed by, as the silver MF flew along the side of Hades its left arm began to tilt upwards as an orange shell began to gather velocity for its attack. Zach’s eyes widened at the short barrel that gazed at his MF.

“Shit...” Zach mumbled just as the grenade round fired. The massive shell exploded into pieces once it collided with Hades’ core. The eruption of flames and debris caused Hades to lag losing its momentum. Chris created his own opportunity for victory, the green flames that continued to pulse out from the chrome boosters while they turned to a 45 degree angle causing Tempest to circle around heading back towards Hades. His brown eyes quivered in unison with the lock on box that was slowly locking onto Hades’ signal. The chiming sound that began to emanate from the FCS inside Tempest created a smile on Chris’ sweat ridden face. His right thumb quickly pressed on the crimson button located on the top of the throttle. In doing so caused the orbital launcher to abruptly shoot open and unleash 4 orbital spheres.

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“What the hell are those?!” Zach screamed as he watched the chrome circular pods began to fly circle around Hades. The pods remained quiet, not yet unleashing the fury of their attacks. At the moment they were only a distraction.

“Well whatever the hell they are they’re getting in my way!” His voice ruptured through the communications array causing Chris to arch his eyebrows in amusement. The fury of Hades was then unleashed in its entirety, the energy scythe flared on as a searing beam of crimson energy flowed out from the top of the scythe. The boosters ignited furiously and within seconds Hades began to slash away at the spheres. It was like trying to hit a fly with one’s hand, the spheres were too agile and with every swing of the mighty weapon they just swayed to the right or to the left.

“You idiot! Those aren’t the main attack! They’re only a distraction!” Reine screamed from his seat believing that Zach would be able to hear his call.

“Calm down, he’s a smart one; he’ll figure it out...eventually.” Mario replied.

“Are you sure?”

“Just be patient and watch.”

“Adam! Where are you going?” A feminine voice blurted out as Adam and Sharon began to descend the concrete stairs in the dome. Adam sighed hitting his forehead with the palm of his hand. For about 2 days he had been dealing with the possible clone of Amy Caecus. He had his own assumptions and theory onto the purpose of her existence if she was in fact a clone but none of them were fully completed, just a bundle of fragments thrown together. Sharon chuckled catching her breath as she glanced at Adam’s appalled face.

“What? Why are you looking at me like that?”

“It’s just funny that’s all. I mean this person has been attached to you for the past 2 days and you are constantly trying to just avoid her. Why is that? I thought she was your friend?”

“Ugh...it’s complicated. I don’t know what she is to be honest. There is no way that Amy could have survived that explosion...”

“I see...but she looks exactly like she does in the pictures you have of her at your apartment.”

“Yeah...exactly like that. And that’s a problem too, she still looks like she’s stuck at 16, there hasn’t been one sign of aging. I firmly do believe that she’s a clone.” Adam replied.

In the background of their conversation the battle for Group ‘A’ champion was still raging on with no sign of a conclusion soon.

“If she’s a clone...actually, does it matter what she is? I mean she’s still a representation of Amy...of a person you lost. I was honestly expecting you to be all over her not letting her out of your sight.”

“Thanks, I guess it’s good to know there’s some form of trust in our relationship.” Adam replied mockingly.

“No...I didn’t mean it like that. I mean after all that you’ve been through, I just figured that you would have wanted to spend time with her...that’s all.”

“Yeah...to be honest there have been some instances when I’ve felt that way. But the fact is that she isn’t human. She is no more than an artificial creation lacking a soul built in with chemical responses that act like memories and emotions. And...and she’s a representation of my failures...my sins. People don’t want to be constantly reminded of their own sins.” Adam replied.

“Orbits?! That’s what these blasted things are!” Zach yelled while Hades swept from side to side trying to avoid the dozens of energy beams that were being thrown at him. Tempest suddenly appeared flying next to Hades catching Zach completely off guard.

“You ok? Did I scare you?” Chris replied sarcastically.

“Shut up!” Zach yelled back as the energy scythe swung at Tempest but narrowly missed when Tempest boosted backwards. While the silver MF moved away Chris began to fire both of his armed

weapons. 3 hardened rockets along with 2 grenade rounds sped towards Hades. Zach cringed and moved Hades to the right avoiding the barrage of rockets but was clipped by one of the grenade rounds. The collision threw Hades off course and into a cross hair of energy beams created by the orbital spheres. Hades' armor began to burn up intensely due to the constant hitting beams. Zach remained calm; the massive rail cannon resting on Hades back had been collecting dust from its inactivity until now. The elongated obsidian cannon extended outwards facing the swarm of orbital spheres.

"Heh, if I can't hit one of you...then I'll just engulf you with a single blast!" Zach screamed firing the cannon. Instantly a thick smooth beam of energy burst out from the cannon, the recoil alone sent Hades spiraling into a free fall. The velocity of the beam was too high for the spheres to handle and within seconds the chrome orbs burst into flames becoming nothing more than singed pieces of debris floating lifelessly in space.

"That was impressive. Well then, shall we finish this?" Chris asked rhetorically as Tempest headed for Hades once again. As Chris approached Zach his eyes widened, Hades during its flipping motions through the energy scythe into space. Due to the momentum gained through the free fall the scythe was incredibly fast and in the blink of an eye pierced through the left leg of Tempest at an angle and protruded out of the right side of the torso just under the arm joint. Chris then cut off the energy to the boosters and flipped up the keyboard for the control panel. He sighed as his eyes stared at the LCD screen listing the damage that had been done.

"Great...generator capacity is now down to 10% , the radiator has been completely severed from the rest of the internal part systems...at this rate I won't be able to do much of anything...lucky kid." Chris mumbled.

Zach once regaining the stability in Hades ferociously roared towards Tempest firing the dual plasma rifle. 2 thick rounds of energy burst onto Tempest's core knocking the silver MF backwards. Chris just remained in his cockpit holding onto the throttles counting down until his MF's shut down. He knew it was going to happen, the previous two blasts caused Tempest to over heat and with no radiator it would just drain the remaining energy in the reserves to keep the MF moving.

"Damn...8%, 6%...4%...2%...and we're off..." Chris mumbled reluctantly as the glowing light on the head unit faded into darkness. The gears around the joints slowly began to stop turning and then there was nothing. By the time Hades arrived at Tempest's location his opponent was out of the fight.

"What? What just happened?" Zach questioned confused.

"You got lucky that's what happened. Your weapon managed to pierce through my internal power sources. I'm in a dead boat now...you won." Chris mentioned while biting his own tongue.

"I won...I won?..." Zach couldn't believe it. This victory declared him the Group 'A' champion and he would go on to face the Group 'B' champion in the quarter finals.

"YES!" Reine blurted out as he jumped up from his seat. Mario just smiled while Michelle's head tilted onto his shoulder.

"Told you...heh (looks like I'm going to have to face that runt in the quarter finals...that is if I advance...ha, who am I kidding. Of course I'll advance.)" Mario's thought processes were hindered because his match was next. The match to determine the Group 'B' champion and the opponent that would face Zach. The tournament was indeed drawing to its end, 128 pilots dwindled down to less than 16.

"You know anything about your next opponent?" Reine questioned as he looked back towards Mario who was simply grinning.

"Yeah, his name is Nex. I heard he was an up and coming pilot in the Trinity Alliance. Don't know much else about him though."

"Huh? You haven't been paying attention to his matches?"

"Nope, didn't find a need to." Mario replied after he flung his arm around Michelle's shoulder.

"And you're not the least bit concerned?"

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“Nope, you’re still young Reine. You have a lot to learn.” Mario smirked. Michelle’s silky right hand began to rub up and down his shoulder blade as the couple quietly left the dome leaving Reine confused staring at the now blank LCD screen. His dark blue hair slowly moving across his face distorting his visions ever few seconds.

Amy smiled as she ran flinging her arms towards Adam. In the corner of Sharon’s eyes she caught the young ambitious girl’s movements and began to chuckle.

“Huh? What is it?” Adam then turned around and at that moment Amy’s arms flung themselves around his shoulders firmly wrapping around his neck. Her thighs tightly wrapped around his torso as she was lifted off the ground leaving Adam to carry her weight. Adam’s wide eyes looked over towards Sharon who nearly fell to the ground in laughter.

“A...Amy...” Adam mumbled.

“Why have you been avoiding me? I thought you would have been happy to see me...” Amy became quiet; she had just taken notice of Sharon to her side. “Is it because of her?”

“It’s...I mean...you’re not...”

“You still don’t believe that I’m the real one?” Her voice became somber, her feelings were hurt and she made sure that everyone was aware of it. Her feet unwrapped from Adam’s back and touched the hard tiled floor. As the weight lifted off his shoulders he just stared into her eyes. He sighed having to look away, unable to look at her for very long without the memories of his past rushing through his mind. The pain was severe; he hated thinking about when he let her down, he forced the tears from pouring out of his eyes however Amy couldn’t. Her mahogany hair violently flapped around grazing across the side of his left cheek as she abruptly ran towards the exit. Another sigh left from his mouth, he turned looking back at Sharon, his eyes watery and his lips slightly angled downward. Sharon smiled grabbing onto his right arm and rested her head onto his shoulder in an attempt to comfort him.

“I don’t know what to do...” Adam mumbled as they took a few steps towards the door while the rest of the spectators remained seated for the upcoming match.

“I wish I could give you a simple answer, one that would solve all your problems but I can’t...All I can do is be here for you and support your decision, whatever that may be.”

“Thanks Sharon...”

Mario smiled as Michelle kissed him on the cheek just before he locked his helmet into place.

“Good luck...” It was cliché to say but he didn’t mind. Michelle cared about him and that fact alone gave her permission to say whatever her heart desired. As he body floated eloquently away from Anima’s ivory cockpit Mario’s fingers pulled the visor down as he flipped on the ignition for his MF. His computer screen displayed a read out of statistical analysis for his opponent Nex, and his MF Nova. It was a light weight bipedal machine that was equipped with an assault rifle and an energy shield that hid an elongated metallic dagger just under the energy generator. In between a multiple missile launcher and a thin light weight laser cannon was a weapon that Nex became infatuated with, a metallic sword with a thin beam of energy that surrounded the edge of the blade. Mario shut off the display screen, he brushed off the analytical data, he knew as well as anyone that numbers are merely numbers and do not take into count the variables of battle.

“This should make for an interesting match.” Mario mumbled under his breath. His eyes lit up once he was clear for launch. The sensation that fueled his adrenaline before battle was irreplaceable. His hands clutched around the throttle while his feet gently applied pressured to the accelerators causing the boosters to slowly ignite with a rage of blaring golden energy. Anima roared out of the hanger soaring into the crisp serene environment of the abyss. Nex had already launched and was currently floating just outside the hanger anxiously waiting for his opponent.

“Mario Liberalis it’s a pleasure to finally meet you. I can’t tell you how long I’ve been waiting for this moment!” Nex shouted.

“Heh, so you’ve heard of me. Then you know that you have no chance of advancing any farther in this tournament.” Mario replied.

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“I wouldn’t go that far. I’ve been studying your matches, and it’s sad to say but you’re predictable.” Nex replied smirking.

“I’m predictable huh? Hehe, we’ll see once the match is underway.” Mario replied.

“Indeed we will...” Nex’s green eyes faltered, he glanced to the side of his cockpit staring at the digital clock. It would soon be time to start the match and he was already uneasy. His confidence was a façade; in truth he was terrified of facing off against Mario. In the past Nex found boasting confidence to be soothing to his already heightened nerves.

Ready? GO!

Now was the time where he knew he had to overcome his own fears. Although he wasn’t completely sure how he was going to do this but he knew he had little time. Nova rocked in space as both of its metallic arms were clutched. Both of Anima’s whips tightly wrapped around the armor plating on Nova’s right and left arm.

“Too slow kid.” Mario mumbled while he forced Anima to speed towards Nova’s defenseless position.

Nex’s pupils thinned as he watched Anima continue to approach at sound piercing speeds. They weren’t any more than a minute into the match and his face was already soaked with perspiration. His head began to look around frantically trying to come up with a quick solution to prevent from being knocked out of the tournament early. As Mario continued his ascent Anima began to fire its laser rifle. The crimson beams pounded onto Nova’s torso causing the green and turquoise MF to dance violently still bound in position by the whips. Without thinking Nex engaged the energy shield, sparks of electricity began to pounce around the whip. A booming crackling sound began to echo forth as the light green energy shield abruptly ignited tearing through the coils wrapped around the left arm. Suddenly Nova was able to move more freely than before, the left hand reached towards the back of the torso grabbing onto the elongated weapon known as Excalibur. The Excalibur sword swung down towards the right arm slicing through the remaining whip. Once Nova was completely free Nex pressed down hard onto the accelerator and began to joust towards Anima.

“That was pretty good kid...but still not enough.” Mario replied. Anima jerked to the left allowing Nova to speed by completely missing its opportunity to strike. Mario wasted little time to turn his MF around. Nex did the same and both combatants collided with their weapons. The Excalibur blade sliced through the energy saber causing it to explode into pieces. The force of the explosion knocked both Anima and Nova in opposite directions.

Mario was the first to regain some stability and went back on the offensive while Nova continued to flip through space uncontrollably. Anima zoomed towards Nova while firing a barrage of beams. Nova had little time to react and was soon bombarded with explosions occurring all over its core. Nex before he knew it was thrown to his right, his crimson helmet cracking at the top the instant it crashed into the side wall. Nova’s defenses were done once again allowing Mario to take full advantage. Anima sped passed Nova while swinging its remaining energy saber. Mario quickly began to repeat the process, bright flickering lights boomed throughout the darkness of space, which was all that the spectators could make out. The furious explosions continued to engulf Nova until Anima came to a screeching halt. Nex struggled to sit back up after the dizzying motions that he had been forced to partake in. His vision was partially blurred as everything around his environment was still spinning.

“Heh...is that it? I won’t be beaten so easily!” Nex managed to scream.

Mario sighed and reclined back into his chair. Just as Nova began to sprint forward each limb abruptly spurted outwards; leaving Nova with only a functional core.

Nex slowly reclined back into his seat, his body became overrun by a numb sensation. He couldn’t believe that he lost and in such a short amount of time. Mario smiled; his eyes glanced back towards Prosperity. Michelle smiled back as she extended her right hand forward towards the floating ivory MF.

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“Well looks like Mario advanced as well.” Stephen mumbled.

“Looks like...” Ashley replied, her voice fading while she stirred her spaghetti constantly.

Stephen glanced towards Ashley finally looking away from the television screen, looking down at his plate which was filled with chicken parmesan and spaghetti. When it first arrived it was steaming with mist like lines floating off the top, but now it was merely left at room temperature. Stephen sighed while Ashley began to laugh.

“What’s so funny?”

She glanced back at him, her eyebrows arched while she gave an overall sinister expression.

“Nothing...just that you had been glued to the television screen since Zach’s match and didn’t even realize that your food had arrived, I just find that amusing.”

“Ugh...oh well.”

Ashley took a small bite out of her Italian cuisine; she then looked back towards Stephen who was staring at his food with a brooding expression.

“What’s the matter?”

“Huh?...oh its nothing.” Stephen replied.

“Please I’m not as ignorant as Adam. Seriously what’s going on?”

“...it’s this whole tournament. Genesis is doing something, they’re always doing something that the world isn’t aware of and now that Revelations, mainly Vincent Avidus has taken control of the TA I’m even more concerned about the war...”

“I see, you just want to leave Prosperity and go back to the war. You believe that something terrible is going to happen huh?”

“Yeah...something like that. Vincent Avidus is a greed-ridden self-absorbed person who will stop at nothing in order to gain what he aspires for. I honestly believe that with him at the head that the TA will do something unforgivable...”

“Unforgivable? Like what?”

“Like launch a nuclear attack...” Stephen mumbled. Thinking the thought of a nuclear strike was gut wrenching but to say it was something terrible of its own.

“A nuclear strike...do you honestly believe that he’ll go that far?”

“I do...and that’s not all...this Rebel...”

“Ugh not you too. Adam’s already obsessing over this guy.”

“I know, but I believe there’s good reason to. He’s too good to not have any MF piloting background. I think Genesis is hiding something about this guy.”

“Like what Stephen?”

“I’m not sure yet...but if that wasn’t enough there’s also this Amy...”

“Amy Caecus? Yeah I was going to ask, I thought she died 2 years ago.”

“She did...”

“Then how is it possible that she’s here? On Prosperity?”

“Genesis has been creating artificial humans; we believe she is one of them. But why would Genesis clone her is beyond me.”

“Ok, let me get this straight. You think this Amy is a clone...and that Genesis is really an evil that this world is unaware of.”

“Heh, yeah, that’s basically it.”

“Oh well if that’s it then I feel much better. For a second I thought you were going to say that Genesis was going to bring about the end of the world.”

Stephen remained quiet for a second taking a small sip of his soda.

“They very well might Ashley...they just might do that.”

Chapter Twenty-Six: Soulless Creatures Born of Sin

“Is everything up and running?” Severen’s voice mumbled throughout the darkness that filled the dismal room. The atmosphere was ominous, the only light in the room was emanating from the thousands of translucent tubes that were secured to the ground. Severen stood in front of the main computer console along with three other scientists employed by Genesis.

“The programming is running at 95% efficiency, much higher than we had originally expected. At this rate the clones will be fully operational in a year and a half. Much sooner than we had predicted earlier.”

“I see...Luscious will be pleased to know that. And you’re positive that they will not have the defects that the Betas had?” Severen needed to make sure because he knew that Luscious would not tolerate failure when it came to the Alphas. These clones had a much bigger destiny than the Betas. Genesis used the Betas to integrate into high society making the task of manipulating the governments much easier.

“Good...I would hate to have caused Luscious to become angry. We are all aware of what happens when he is not pleased.

Severen eased the head scientist, his hand patted gently on the shoulder covered by the crimson cloth. Just as Severen turned around alarms began to blare loudly, crimson bulbs began to circulate rapidly causing the inner walls to light up with the red hue. Severen and the other scientist all turned around frantically looking at one another in an eruption of chaotic confusion.

“What the hell is that?! What the hell is going on?!” Severen screamed.

The lead scientist with his silver and light gray strands of hair flinging in the air began to type at an accelerated rate. The edges of his fingers stroking the keys without hesitation, the factory was hidden in a secured location hundreds of feet under the foundation of Genesis’ main building in New York. They knew a security breach was near impossible.

“I don’t know! I don’t know....what the hell is this?” His voice cracked from the shock of his realization. Severen lacking patience abruptly pushed the elderly man aside causing him to fall off his chair. What Severen saw was not something he was fully prepared for; it was an image of one of the chambers containing some of the clones. Shards of blood stained glass covered the walkway in front of one of the experimental artificially created humans. Along with glass the floor was drenched in artificial amniotic fluid that is what they use to suspend the clones through their constant growth throughout the

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weeks following their initial creation. Severen couldn't comprehend what had just happened; it was obvious that one of the clones had managed to escape but which one was up in the air.

"Is this possible? I mean, can one of the clones just break out of their own tube while suspended in the amniotic fluid?" Severen asked quietly as he glanced back glaring at the trinity of scientists that stood before him.

"A normal clone does not have that ability without help from an outside source..." His voice began to fade as he came to his own conclusion.

"A normal clone? Are you suggesting that this wasn't a normal clone, that it was a clone with extraordinary abilities? Ha." Severen mentioned.

Suddenly the ground began to tremble violently, thin pieces of rocks and other sorts of debris began to fall to the floor constantly. Severen immediately crawled under the desk looking for protection from the randomly falling pieces of debris. Along with the rumbling ground came a thunderous sound that hummed throughout the facility. With his arms covering his head and flowing blonde hair Severen began to scream out to the group of scientists who were just typing vigorously on the computers trying to find out what had exactly occurred.

"What the hell was that?!" Severen screamed.

"You honestly don't know? You should be aware of what that sound is, more so than any of us." The first scientist mentioned.

"You can't be serious...are you telling me that an MF just launched?" Severen mumbled.

"That's exactly what I'm telling you. Now if you would please either shut up or call Luscious and inform him of what is going on so we can focus on cleaning up this tragedy."

"I'm not calling Luscious until I know exactly what is going on? Why the hell is there an MF in this facility anyway?" Severen screamed.

"Luscious was the one who had the MF stationed here. Hell I wouldn't be surprised if he had predicted that this would happen."

"Predicted? Just what clone managed to escape?" Severen continued to scream showing no knowledge of the volume of his own voice.

Vincent Avidus stood staring out of his office located in Revelations main facility. His pane glass window gave an accurate view of the nation's capital. The gentle breeze rustled the leaves that whisked through the ground dancing at their own erratic rhythm. He smiled slightly at the sound of the communications display beeping on his desk. His silver hair flapped across his face as he turned around quickly.

"Yes, what is it?" He answered the call with a bitter response. At the other end of the display was General Copiare who had recently been transferred back to Earth, specifically the TA naval fleet outside of West Point. His stern face stared back at Vincent Avidus, his eyes were quivering from fear.

"Sir...an MF has appeared on the outside coast of Manhattan."

"I see. Has it been identified?"

"No sir it has not been confirmed to be related to either the TA or the EAP."

"Fine...we can not take any chances. I want you to engage the target and take it down as quick as possible." Vincent replied.

"But sir..."

"Don't question my judgment. My authority is absolute is that understood General?"

"*sigh* Yes sir..." The General quickly shut off the communications link turning around to his loyal men. "You heard him...launch all Shades to engage the enemy MF."

"But sir...the MF hasn't been confirmed as an enemy or friend..." An ensign interrupted.

"That does not matter. We have no choice but to follow the orders we are given. NOW LAUNCH!"

"Yes sir!" Each soldier firmly replied saluting their superior.

Each soldier was geared up running to their respected Shades. Most of them were cautious and weary about fighting in the atmosphere. The Shades were made to advance in ground combat, desert like conditions mainly due to the Martian surface. The leg units were coated with thick armor plating that extended outwards in a spike like shape near the knee-joints; two thin points also pointed out from the right and left edges just above the metallic feet. Its thighs were block-like in structure giving the Shade a respectable amount of defense. The torso itself was massive and rough to look at. The arms were the sleekest part of the Shade unit, the shoulder an octagonal like structure that covered most of the thin armoring of the arm. Every unit came equipped with a thin high active laser rifle and a solid shield on its left arm. Four missile packs were attached along the back torso between the shoulder blades. Since the battle was going to be aerial in nature special flight packs were equipped to each Shade. The flight packs were reminiscent of the wings found on a fight plane, mainly a Viper. Four thin angular wings that extended outwards with special thrusters allowing for easier maneuverability in the air. Each Shade began to ignite their engines, 30 Shades in all creating a massive thunderous sound that was still soothing to the ears.

“Pilots...you are clear to launch. Make sure to take down the enemy MF as quickly as possible without causing damage to the city or residential areas. If possible try and keep the battle above the ocean!” General Copiare said firmly as he saluted the 30 pilots who were preparing to head out.

Above the identified enemy MF continued to fly in a spastic path of travel. The clone that managed to escape from the Genesis facility was still trying to get his bearings straight. And yet the controls came naturally to him. His dark brown hair covered most of his tanned face, his crimson eyes pierced through the strands of dangling hair; he enjoyed the sight of the ivory clouds swimming across the azure canvas.

“What...am I? Why am I here?” These words began to roll out from his frigid tongue. He was confused and rightfully so, he was abruptly thrown into a world that he did not understand and found himself inside a machine that he had only seen in his dreams.

Beep....Beep....incoming....

The feminine computerized voice quietly stated grabbing the confused man's attention. His parted the strands of hair that covered his eyes so he could see the radar clearly. 30 ivory dots continued to flicker on the obsidian radar screen.

“What does that mean?” Just as he gazed into the mysterious radar screen two of the 30 Shades began to fire without warning. Instinctively the cloned pilot grabbed onto the throttles and pulled them to his side controlling the movements of his MF with the grace and agility of a professional pilot. The two crimson energy beams soared past his line of sight, no longer was he confused, he had snapped into a zone of focus and complete understanding.

“I can pilot this thing...is this my destiny? Is that why I exist? To pilot this machine...yes...I can feel it in the pit of my stomach. A sensation, this feeling, I've felt this before...” He mumbled as a grin slowly formed on the outer cheeks of his face.

The two Shade pilots that broke away from their battalion stared in awe. They recognized the MF as they drew closer and with that sense of familiarity came instantaneous fear. Their bodies froze as the demonic MF began to fly towards them, with each passing moment the cloned pilot began to understand the potential his machine contained within itself.

“No...” The TA pilots mumbled just as dozens of crimson beams ruptured through their MFs and cockpits. The positron energy engulfed their bodies causing them to disintegrate within the fury of the blasts.

Caliginous clouds of smoke oscillated around the location of the destroyed Shades. The 28 remaining Shades quickly halted their ascent in confusion.

“What just happened...oh my God...” On of the pilots screamed. Suddenly a crimson MF sped out from the clouds causing them to disperse into the atmosphere. The velocity of the MF gave the TA

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pilots no time to react. The demon tore through the cluster of Shades with its energy lance extended slicing through the torsos of half of the battalion. As the other 14 pilots watched in fear while their comrades were mercilessly killed in an instant they became paralyzed in their own fear of death.

General Copiare stood staring in amazement as tons of singed debris and smoke descended into the lively ocean that was holding his naval fleet afloat.

“What the hell can be doing this...” He mumbled under his breath while clutching onto his chest in terror.

“Cease and desist by the authority of the Trinity Alliance... *gulp*” The pilot didn’t believe that he could sway the unknown pilot of the terrorizing MF to stop, but he didn’t know what else to try.

“Stop? Hehehe...this is a rush. I have never felt anything so fulfilling as this!” The pilot screamed back in a fit of rage. The crimson MF quickly changed its course and swept passed the remaining Shades tearing through each of them like a hot knife through butter. As the MF zoomed past the MFs each Shade exploded in a fury of flames. The General stumbled back from the sudden shock of losing 30 Shades in a matter of 5 minutes. He knew there was nothing ordinary about the bogey they had just encounter.

“Get me Vincent Avidus...” He calmly mumbled to the Ensigns standing behind him.

“But sir...”

“NOW!”

“Yes...yes sir.” The ensigns quickly scrambled all running towards the communications room on the ship. General Copiare continued to stare into the burning sky as the mysterious MF sped into the horizon.

“Luscious...one of the clones managed to escape from the facility...” Severen’s voice constantly cracked due to his overworking nerves. Luscious looked away from the display screen sighing.

“Luscious....”

“It’s fine Severen, thank you for keeping me informed.” Luscious replied.

“Luscious, I’m not sure if you understand the severity of the situation...the clone stole the MF you kept in the hanger.” Severen replied.

Luscious’ eyes glistened with intrigue; he immediately turned around to stare back at Severen’s shaking face.

“He stole the MF huh...heheh...hahaha...HAHAHAHA” Luscious couldn’t contain his own amusement even if it was at the expense of Severen’s fears and confusion.

“Luscious are...are you alright?” The static began to distort the image of Luscious on Severen’s communications display screen.

“I’m fine Severen...destiny is a funny thing you know that.”

“Huh? I’m afraid I don’t follow.”

“Even after death he can’t escape that machine...hahaha...”

“Luscious, we haven’t confirmed the identity of the clone that escaped yet... how can you possibly...”

“The MF in the hanger. Only one man could pilot it, therefore it is painfully obvious who this clone is Severen. You should have been able to figure this out on your own.” Luscious replied.

“Luscious...”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m pretty sure that this clone will show up sooner or later. Tell me about the Alphas, how is the programming coming along?”

“Oh...um...a lot better than we expected. The system is running at 95% efficiency. They should be ready in a year and a half. A lot earlier than originally predicted.”

“I see...that is great news. I’m impressed Severen, you’re doing an excellent job on Earth.”

“Thank you Luscious...how is the tournament working out?”

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“As to be expected, the final quarter final match ended today. The semis start tomorrow. The fun will be beginning shortly, only 8 more matches until it comes to its conclusion.”

“I see...and what about the failure?”

“Rebel? He’s still advancing as to be expected. He will most likely be in the finals. However he is growing impatient and has stolen 4 experimental MFs from our hanger. I think he intends on taking things into his own hands.” Luscious replied.

“Shouldn’t we stop him then?”

“No...let’s just sit back and watch at how this plays out. Revelations has already taken control of the TA and from what I’ve heard is planning on launching a nuclear strike against the EAP. This world will be falling to hell soon enough. I’ll let Rebel try it his way, but we’ll be there to pick up the pieces.” Luscious replied.

“Stephen congratulations!” Ashley screamed loudly as Stephen slowly descended from his cockpit. He simply waved back to the group of reporters and friends that awaited him. He had just finished his match against Seriph in the quarter finals and managed to grab the Section ‘I’ championship. Everyone was well aware that the tournament up until now was child’s play; the key players have surfaced all preparing to face off against one another.

“Stephen Novus! Can we get a quick word from you after that amazing display of talent?” Stephanie Star screamed as she pushed a few other reporters out of her way. Stephen smiled as the obsidian microphone abruptly shoved into his face.

“Umm...I guess so...”

“Great! Stephen you have just moved onto the semi-finals, your opponent for that match is Seina Armana, the Section ‘H’ champion. He has proven himself extremely capable of handling high intense situations with little signs of hesitation.”

“Yes, I have seen a few of Seina’s matches and he is a skilled pilot. Is there a question to this?”

“Yeah of course. Are you worried about your match with him?”

“Heh, I don’t worry about any of the matches I participate in. I just take things as they’re handed to me.”

“I see, that’s a very unique way of handling things.”

“I guess.”

“You are aware of the possibility of facing your own brother, Adam Novus in the Pre-Final match.”

“Heh, yeah I’m fully aware that it is a high possibility that I will have to face Adam. I’m pretty confident that things will turn out that way.” Stephen replied. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I have somewhere that I need to be.” Stephen said finally as he began to shove his way through the crowd. Ashley smiled as she leaned against the wall with her arms folded across her chest.

“Good job Stephen.” Ashley subtly replied.

“Thanks...it wasn’t that hard of a match.”

“I know...not for you anyways.”

“Heh, I guess. Where’s everyone else?”

“That’s the thing. They’re all glued in Adam’s room....”

“Huh? Why? What’s going on?”

“I’m not really too sure...but Adam said something has happened on Earth and that you would need to know about it. He told me to get you as soon as your match ended...” Before she was able to finish Stephen grabbed onto her arm and began to sprint towards the dormitories.

“Aren’t you going to change first?”

“No...I don’t like waiting for surprises.” Stephen replied.

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Adam smirked as he looked at everyone else who patiently sat in his room all waiting for Stephen's arrival. Everyone quickly silenced their mouths as they noticed the door knob slowly beginning to rotate. The door creaked open as Stephen began to enter the door, his body quickly became entrenched in the dark void of the room.

"What the hell?"

"SURPRISE!" Every feminine voice echoed throughout the room as the lights quickly flickered on. There were a few banners hung from the ceiling all saying the same thing, "Happy Birthday." Stephen sighed as he turned back to Ashley who was smiling radiantly pushing him forward into the room.

"I can't believe you people...." Stephen mumbled.

"What? It's your birthday after all." Adam replied

"Heh...thanks..." Stephen reluctantly replied. He didn't really care for celebrations, but he was enjoying the attention regardless.

"Happy 19th bro!" Mario blurted out.

Adam stood up from his bed as Sharon let go of his hand. His hand slowly rose a glass filled with wine.

"Happy birthday bro...this is to a safe but thrilling end to the Azure Cup Tournament. We have 8 matches left until the end. Each of us personally would like to believe we have as much as 3 more matches left in us. But we know that might not be the case. Good luck to each and every one of us." Adam said firmly.

"Here here, couldn't have said it any better myself bro." Mario replied.

"I agree...let's finish this tournament strong." Stephen replied.

"To the upcoming end of the Azure Cup." All of them said simultaneously while raising their glasses in a toast.

Chapter Twenty-Seven: Berserker's Fury

The Azure Cup had been diminished to 8 remaining matches that would pit the most talented pilots against one another in a battle to determine the strongest among them. The time had come where the semi-finals took the stage. The intensity of the battles was expected to be far superior to the battles that had come before. The dome was filled to maximum capacity, people who were dying to watch all of the semi-final matches that were scheduled to take place all in the same day refused to watch it on their own televisions and did what they could in order to stay in the dome to watch it live. Women sat on their male counterpart's lap while others just stood leaning against the door, most felt that standing up was a small price to pay in order to watch the matches in the dome.

Mario shrugged and chuckled at all of the attention being given to the semi-finals. He had the luxury of having the first match against Zach. He had seen all of Zach's matches and knew how he fought and how dangerous he could become when pushed into a corner. He hated to admit it but he was well aware that his match against Zach was not going to be an easy one. His knuckles cracked as his arms stretched outwards before being placed onto the throttles inside Anima. Mario smiled at the radiating face of Michelle. Her head leaning onto the edge of his control panel while her torso hung outside of Anima's opened cockpit. The strands of her medium length light brown hair continued to float eloquently due to the lack of gravity.

"I should probably be going now..." Mario mumbled.

"Heh...yeah. Be careful out there alright?"

"You know me. I'll be fine."

"You know it's fine if you don't win."

"Thanks but we'll deal with that road when we come to it. For now just sit back and enjoy the show." Mario replied, his right eye winking at Michelle. She chuckled and slowly moved towards Mario's face. The two began to embrace kissing as a sign of good luck before the beginning of the match.

Adam, Sharon, Stephen, Ashley, Heather, Reine, and even Amy all stood at the edge of the guardrail above the garage launching pad watching the happy couple.

"Ugh, this is disturbing. Come on you two! There are other matches scheduled for today you know!" Adam yelled out.

Mario began to laugh while Michelle's lips were still attached to his own. Sharon cringed once again smacking Adam across the head.

"Ow! What the hell did I do this time?" Adam asked rubbing the back of his scalp while everyone else began to laugh at his own expense.

"Alright Michelle, I really should be heading out now. The kid's already waiting for me." Mario replied.

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Michelle nodded silently as her arms pushed her body away from Anima's cockpit. She slowly floated towards the guardrail above where Heather and Ashley grabbed onto her arms and lifted her over the rail. Mario smirked and closed his visor.

"Mario Liberalis....heading out!" His voice boomed forth as Anima launched out of the hanger. As the ivory MF sped out of the hanger its boosters ignited allowing it to fly effortlessly into space.

"So you think he's going to win?" Michelle asked well both Adam and Stephen stared off into space.

"To be honest I'm not sure who's going to win this match. Both pilots are equally skilled. All I can say is that it's going to be one hell of a battle." Adam replied.

Zach was already breathing heavily, he had overcome many tribulations before but now he was once again pitted against someone he knew personally. His fingers constantly tapping along the rough edges around the throttles, his feet were slightly tapping onto the cold hard metal of the accelerators. He was anxious as well as nervous, he wasn't sure what to expect from Mario or what to expect from his own performance.

"Are you ready kid?" Mario asked breaking the monotony that was filling Hades's cockpit. The abrupt sound of Mario's voice caused Zach's head to instantly jerk upwards looking at the communications display.

"Yeah..."

"Come on, we're going to give this crowd one hell of a show. Good luck." Mario replied.

"Yeah....you're right. Good luck."

Ready? GO!

The match began a lot sooner than Zach was prepared for. He found himself struggling with the throttles. In that quick instance Anima quickly began its approach. Mario smiled as he enjoyed the speed he was traveling at, he loved the sensation of moving at speeds that most people could only dream of and never grasp in reality. To Zach's amazement Anima appeared on his left side. Hades slowly began to move trying to turn around in order to counter the attack he knew was coming but Anima managed to strike first. The metallic whip spiraled out from the right arm; the whip collided with Hades' torso causing the orange MF to be knocked away from Anima. As Hades flipped uncontrollably Anima continued its descent and began to fire the laser rifle. As the beams seared passed Hades the solid shield on Anima released the thin laser rifle into the ivory MF's left hand. The cold metal fingers grasped the rifles and instantly began to fire. Both the right and left arm continued to jerk back due to the recoil created by the rifle. Zach managed to bring stability to his MF just in time to be caught by dozens of lime green energy beams. Hades was thrown into a violent dance as the beams continued to explode all over the orange armor. Zach was whipped around in the cockpit due to the intensity of the explosions, his hair flowing inside the helmet, small thin strands of his hair clustered together covering his eyes hindering his vision.

"Arg! Damn it!" Zach screamed, he began to freak out as his fingers let off the throttles and began to try and unlock the helmet so he could move his hair out of his face.

Mario's eyebrows arched in curiosity as he stared at Hades which had become motionless. Mario stopped his assault because his energy reservoir was draining at a rapid rate.

"What the hell is that kid doing? Damn..." Mario knew he couldn't hold anything back, not with all that was at stake. Anima's right leg arched in front of its left as the boosters flared once again. Anima sped towards the motionless Hades, both the left and right arm flung to the side flinging out the metallic whip. As both whips dangled in space currents of cerulean glowing electricity began to circulate around the metallic weapon. Mario had yet to use the metallic whips at their full potential, he felt now was a good of time as any to test them out.

Zach finally threw his helmet off his head and pulled his hair away from his face. As the hair strands moved away his pupils began to shorten. Anima was no more than 20 meters away from his position. Zach also took notice of the whips that were searing with electricity.

“God damn!” Zach screamed. He quickly placed his hands back on the throttles and forced Hades to move. The orange MF swayed to the right just as he fired the dual plasma rifle. The dual layered crimson beam zoomed towards Anima but Mario remained calm. As the beam neared Anima swatted the beam with both whips. The collision deflected the beam to fly off to the left side, as Zach remained stunned Anima’s whips flung around Hades’ torso. The collision rocked the MF violently. Suddenly the electric currents began to overrun Hades causing the heat to raise significantly. Hades continued to struggle trying to escape the grasps of Anima but was unable to do so. Mario began to feel the match was drawing to an end, his feet became heavier and strongly rested on the accelerator.

Anima picked up even more speed and forcefully tackled into the bound Hades. At the exact moment of impact Anima retraced the whips causing Hades to flip freely away. Mario then re-equipped the dual laser rifles and began to fire furiously. Hades flung from side to side as dozens of energy beams bounced off its armor. It appeared that Mario had the complete upper hand during the entire match.

“I won’t lose...I won’t lose...I WON’T LOSE!” Zach abruptly screamed out. Suddenly his pupils began to fade being only replaced by a gray gradient. His chest heaving in and out at a rapid pace, his fingers were now fixedly attached to the throttles. With a few quick movements Hades burst out of its flipping motions and began to head straight for Anima. Mario smirked; he was waiting for this moment, the moment where Zach would become an absolute threat.

“Good! This is what I’ve been waiting for!” Mario screamed back at the berserker teen.

The speed at which Hades was traveling at was incredible barely detectable by the human eye and within an instant Hades grabbed hold of the energy scythe and swung it. Mario’s eyes widened as he fell back into his seat. Anima arched its torso to the left narrowly avoiding the attack and quickly countered by swinging its right leg. As the leg swung Hades’ left hand firmly grabbed onto Anima’s leg preventing the attack from coming to fruition.

“Not bad.” Mario replied as he raised the dual laser rifles and fired at close range. The beams exploded onto Hades’ core forcing the orange MF to let go of Anima’s leg. Then Anima flung out the metallic whips once again and with subtle movements began to swing away towards Hades. Zach remained fully focused onto Anima and with a single swing at a diagonal path destroyed the two metallic whips. The explosion knocked Anima away spinning.

At first Mario wanted a challenge but he cringed now, Zach was becoming a serious threat.

“What’s going on? Mario was winning before! What happened?!” Michelle screamed out.

Adam and Stephen sighed and then glanced back at each other.

“He went berserk again...” Adam mumbled.

“Yeah...” Stephen calmly replied.

Hades had turned the match completely around and was on a furious offensive attack. The energy scythe continued to swing but missed its target each time. Mario was beginning to feel exhausted; every time he would attack Hades would either block it or avoid it completely. Just then Hades swung the energy scythe once again but Anima blocked it with quick sword work. At the last second Anima ignited his dual energy saber and swung upwards to counter Zach’s attack. The two weapons continued to rub against one another struggling for superiority.

“This is the most fun I’ve had this entire tournament kid.” Mario mentioned as small beams of energy flickered away from the main conflict of weapons.

“...” Zach remained quiet, refusing to lose his focus.

“I see...caught up in the moment huh. That’s fine... what the hell?!” Mario screamed as he watched Hades moved forward. The energy scythe suddenly ruptured through the dual energy saber causing it to explode completely. The force of the attack caused Hades’ right arm and torso to arch

downward. Mario snickered while forcing Anima's knee upwards to hit Hades' head unit. Just as Hades was thrown back a bit from the attack Anima dropped the right laser rifle and punched the head unit while the boosters ignited giving the MF extra velocity to add to the attack. As the metallic fist collided with the head unit it quickly opened up and grabbed onto the head unit. As Anima held onto Hades' it began to speed towards a floating asteroid; the asteroid was small in stature and posed no serious threat to humanity, it managed to slip away from the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. Mario screamed loudly as he stepped on the accelerators with all his strength, Anima's boosters exploded with power sending it straight for the asteroid. Then it happened, Hades' head unit was forced crashing into the edge of the space rock causing specks of electrical debris to fling outwards. Zach cringed and grabbed his throttle, suddenly Hades' left arm swung upwards with the energy scythe piercing through Anima's right arm.

"Damn it!" Mario screamed as Anima quickly moved away avoiding another attack. As the orange MF moved itself out from the asteroid its head unit began to dangle loosely for a few seconds until flames ruptured quickly causing a minute explosion that destroyed the head unit completely. Mario began to laugh.

"This is a lot more fun than I originally expected. Now we're even, you've lost a good amount of your radar capabilities and I'm short an arm."

"..."

"Still focusing on the adrenaline huh? That's fine...let's end this!" Mario screamed.

Anima quickly began to speed towards Hades firing the remaining laser rifle. Hades had a few problems avoiding the beams and was hit every so often. Zach began to breathe a little heavier than usual when he ended up falling to his inner instincts. Hades began to sway to the left avoiding a good amount of beams. Mario sighed as the rifle finally ran out of ammunition. Suddenly Hades began to glow ominously as it slowly moved towards Anima. For the first time in a long time Mario felt a sharp chill sprint down his spine. Just as he began to move the throttles Hades sliced through Anima's left arm and then slashed through the torso causing it to dislodge from the lower legs.

Michelle couldn't watch the match anymore, her head quickly turned away into Ashley's shoulders. Both Adam and Stephen nodded towards each other, they knew that Zach was going to be a serious contender and would most likely meet Rebel before any of them got the chance to.

The feminine announcer finally made the announcement that they were well aware of.

"Zach Orion advances....Anima is no longer able to fight!"

Michelle nearly burst out into tears at the decision as she lunged into Ashley's arms.

"He fought well..." Ashley mumbled. She wasn't sure what she could say in order to make her feel any better if anything at all.

"You think Zach will be able to defeat Rebel?" Adam asked as he glanced over to his brother who was still leaning over the guardrail watching as the disheveled Anima was brought back into the hanger alongside Hades.

"Eh, he's got this berserker trait that manages to keep him in the tournament. But I don't think it will be enough to topple Rebel....speaking of which his match is next." Stephen replied.

"I know....I almost want to just skip it. I mean we already know he's going to advance." Adam replied

"True....but now would be a good time to watch and continue analyzing his battle tactics." Stephen mentioned.

"Please....you know that is possible. He finishes off his opponents with such speed that there isn't enough time to get a proper look at his technique." Adam replied.

"Hmm...yeah you're right..." Stephen mumbled.

"Hey guys...." Mario's voice came as a shock to most as he abruptly appeared behind them.

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“Mario! You scared the hell out of me!” Michelle screamed as she ran jumping into his opened arms.

“You fought a good match bro.” Adam said.

Mario simply nodded. “That kid has one hell of a berserker trait held up inside him.”

“That he does....” Stephen replied.

The conversation continued to proceed while Shadow launched into space for his match. His opponent Diablos was a strong opponent who most felt had a good chance at defeating Rebel and knock him out of the tournament. Diablos’ MF was painted charcoal black and blended in nicely with the space backdrop. His MF, Diabolical was equipped only with two energy sabers, he felt that it was all he needed to get the job done, and according to his record it was. However he wasn’t sure how his method would fare against Rebel, but he knew there was only one way to find out.

“Are you going to be a challenge for me?” Rebel’s voice softly emanated through Diablos’ communications channel. Diablos chuckled under his breath, he was nervous but he didn’t want to reveal that to his opponent.

“Only one way to find out right?” Diablos replied with a smirk lighting his face.

“Hehe...I like you. You have a sense of humor. I will try and make your defeat as painless as possible.” Rebel replied. “I am sorry Mr. Tzu once again our invigorating discussion is going to have to wait until after I finish this match.”

The connection from the communication channel suddenly closed leaving Diablos in his cockpit staring out into the abyss. His eyes quivering around the MF that was trying to keep him from advancing.

Ready? GO!

The adrenaline kicked in suddenly as Diablos forced his MF to speed towards Rebel with reckless intentions. Rebel smirked, his arms slowly moving away from his chest grabbing hold of the throttles. Diablos screamed with all his emotions as he swung his MF’s right arm. The fizzling beam of energy soared through the image of Shadow. At first Diablos screamed out in joy and celebration, he was too caught up in the moment to even question how his beam tore through Shadow without coming across a solid resistance.

“I guess I expected too much from you....pity.” Rebel calmly mentioned as Shadow quickly appeared behind Diabolical. Diablos frightened slowly turned his head around.

Shadow quickly sliced through the joints on Diabolical causing it to explode in four locations. Clusters of thick clouds began to float around Diabolical while Shadow remained hovering above with its arms crossed across the torso. Luscious sighed as he picked up his ancient copy of *The Art of War* and began to read once again while Diablos froze in his seat stricken with fear.

“Tell me why I’m not at all surprised by that outcome...” Adam mumbled as he flung his hands up in disappointment.

“Do I even have to answer that?” Stephen questioned.

“No.”

“Listen just focus, you’re match is next.” Stephen replied.

“I know....I’m fighting that guy named Diavolo. I’m not too worried.” Adam replied as he began to head towards the locker room.

“Adam....promise me that you’ll be careful.” Sharon yelled out interrupting Adam and Stephen. Adam nodded to both Sharon and Stephen.

“He’ll be fine...” Heather mentioned as she placed her hand onto Sharon’s quivering shoulder. Sharon smiled as she looked back towards Heather.

“I know...but I feel like I have to remind him every time he goes out there.” Sharon replied.

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Adam stared at his azure and black jumpsuit. Sweat was rolling down his face forcing him to wipe his forehead with a cloth towel every few seconds. His body fell towards the locker and slowly fell to the ground. The stress was beginning to take its toll on him physically. The appearance of Amy, clone or not she was still a representation of his sins, and with the tournament drawing to a close he was getting closer to a rematch with Rebel358.

“You’re worrying already huh? And for what? Please tell me you’re not worrying yourself sick over Diavolo.” Rebel’s calm voice was never soothing to his ear; as a matter of fact he despised it.

Adam glanced back at Rebel who was still wearing his dark purple and black jumpsuit. Rebel approached Adam taking a seat on the wooden bench in front of Adam.

“Ugh...what do you want?”

“I wanted to make sure you’re still in the game. Do you honestly think you’ll advance if you go out there like this?”

“I’m fine. Heh, I don’t take you as the type of person who is concerned with the well-being of others.” Adam replied as he stumbled back to his feet.

“Heh...don’t get me wrong I’m not. But I want to make sure you make it to the finals. I’m going to be the one to defeat you.” Rebel replied.

“Hahaha, what does it matter? Why is that an important goal? You beat me already...pretty badly if I recall our previous encounter.” Adam replied.

“Yeah...but you weren’t in your machine. You were bound to that limits of the MF given to you. Plus...I want to test the limitations of your MF.” Rebel replied as he stood up heading for the door.

“...”

“Just make it to the finals. That’s all you have to do.” Rebel replied one final time before he left the room.

Adam sighed as he began to put on his jumpsuit.

“I’ll make you regret wanting to face me...just wait and see...”

Chapter Twenty-Eight: Rebirth

He wanted to ignore what Rebel had said to him earlier but it was a task easier said than done. Adam stared at his opponent Diavolo who stood before him glaring back at Blue Dragon's eloquent existence. Diavolo's MF was purple with tints of black, the lightly armored MF had sharp protruding spike attached to the shoulder blades and the knee joints. The MF had four elongated cannons that dangled off the back of the core; two of the cannons would pivot just underneath the arm joints of the core while the other two pivoted to rest onto of the stiff armored shoulders. The unnamed MF lingered in space while holding onto a modified rail gun; it lacked the power of the highly revered rail cannon, but still was a high damaging rifle that could be held in the hand of an MF. Along with these weapons Diavolo also was equipped with two javelins that were solid based, the advantage of this was that it didn't drain any extra energy from the generator reserves. Adam smirked as the digital clock hit "0", it was time and he couldn't be happier to take out his stress on someone.

Ready? Go!

"I am sorry to disappoint you Azure Knight but you will not be making it to face Rebel! I will be the one to defeat him!" Diavolo screamed while Adam chuckled.

"You're amusing. But you haven't beaten me yet. Maybe you should focus on the task at hand before drowning yourself in delusions of grandeur." Adam replied. The cerulean boosters ignited as his MF soared with both laser rifles aiming forward. Once the lock on box solidified around Diavolo's MF Adam began to fire. The cerulean beams were knocked aside as the purple MF covered its torso with its arms. The armor plating surrounding the arm units were composed of the same alloy that made up most solid shields. In a way Diavolo's MF was an active shield; the ultimate shield. Adam cringed as he watched his volley impose no damaged whatsoever.

"Heh, looks like I'm going to have to take a different approach to you then." Adam mumbled.

"You're welcome to TRY IT!" Diavolo screamed, the crimson boosters raged onwards as the purple MF soared towards Blue Dragon with its rail gun gathering energy. The crimson spheres of energy that were circulating around the barrel were a sure sign of the attack being prepared. Just then Blue Dragon boosted in front of the purple MF with both energy sabers now ignited. Diavolo arched back into his seat, he was shocked at the speed of Blue Dragon. Prematurely the rail gun fired, the blast wasn't at its full potential however Adam still found it necessary to avoid the blast. Blue Dragon's torso tilted to the right allowing the beam of energy speed by hitting nothing but the void of space. Adam reacted instantly, Blue Dragon's right arm swung upwards. The cerulean beam of energy sliced through the purple MF's leg units but was blocked as it neared the torso. Diavolo forced his MF to move away from Blue Dragon, just then the four elongated cannons moved into their position. Adam sighed as he watched all four cannons unleash a tempest of energy. The blaring beams of energy all began to twirl towards a certain focal point until they fused creating one immense beam of energy. Just as the beam neared Adam he pulled the throttles to the side while pressing forcefully onto the accelerators. The boosters moved to a 45 degree angle as the ignited sending the blue MF to the side once again avoiding the attack.

Diavolo's purple MF sped towards Blue Dragon appearing before the blue MF with a trail of metallic debris floating out of the massive gash below the torso. The rail gun was dropped as it now floated in the depth of space, the MF now held onto its two javelins. Adam's eyes widened as Diavolo swung both arms furiously. The sharp tip of both javelins managed to scratch through the azure armor plating on the torso and right arm of Blue Dragon.

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“You bastard...you touched my MF.” Adam screamed out. A glowing aura of energy began to radiate around the eight wings that now fully extended outwards. Diavolo sighed as he knew what was coming next. The eight wings zoomed out from the wing attachments and began to dash around space in random formations all circling around Diavolo.

“Heh, those orbital wings are nice but won’t do much. You already know my MF is the ultimate shield! No energy beam can penetrate it they will just bounce off!”

“Heh, that maybe true.” Adam said.

Suddenly Diavolo began to swing his MF’s arms in a poking formation, the elongated javelins all pierced nothing as Blue Dragon continued to boost backwards avoiding every attack. Suddenly the wings began to fire relentlessly and just as Diavolo expected the beams just bounced off. But the orbital wings were causing a distraction; with every attack Diavolo was unable to fully execute his attack. The force of the beams knocked the arms off course giving Adam enough time to attack.

“But they are one hell of a distraction!” Adam screamed as Blue Dragon zoomed towards Diavolo, both energy sabers fully ignited held at both sides. In a single crossing motion the two arms jerked upwards forcing the beams of energy to pierce through the critical arm joints connecting the torso and the arm units together; the one place that did not have the armor plating. The orbital wings quickly attached themselves back to Blue Dragon’s core as Adam continued flying.

“Hehehe...I may not have my arm...but my cannons are still fully functional!” Diavolo screamed as the four cannons quickly locked onto Blue Dragon’s heat signature.

Adam’s eyes widened as he forced Blue Dragon around to face the massive beam of energy that was now heading straight for him. With some last minute maneuvering Blue Dragon swayed to the side however the sheer size of the beam was still too much. The right arm was engulfed in the blast causing an explosion to send Blue Dragon tumbling through space. Adam pounded his fist onto the control panel in frustration.

“You bastard...” Adam mumbled. Blue Dragon quickly flew out of the tumbling motions and with one energy saber left sliced through the cannon’s joints causing it to explode furiously. Diavolo began to scream in angst.

“DAMN IT!” He screamed as Blue Dragon loomed over the defeated pilot.

“That was a pretty good match. I apologize, but I will be the one to defeat Rebel358...” Adam replied calmly. He sighed looking back to Prosperity where he knew Sharon was worrying over his own well being. And then there was Amy, he knew that she too was still harboring feelings. The fact was still clear that he didn’t know how to react to those feelings.

“(Damn...I really need to calm down...I think I need a break. At least Stephen’s up next...)” His mind began to wander as he steered his MF back to the Prosperity hanger.

“So Adam advanced yet again...” Rebel mumbled to himself.

“But isn’t that what you wanted?” The voice of one of his chosen 4, Pestilence said softly. His green lopsided hair covered his left eye leaving only his right one visible.

“I do...its just amusing because sometimes I find myself doubting his abilities....he’s too...too attached this world.” Rebel replied.

“Attached? I’m not sure I follow.” Pestilence replied.

“I’m not surprised; your feeble mind can only process so much information in such a short period of time. Allow me to explain...” Before he proceeded Rebel took a sip of the glass of Merlot that sat on his desk. He still was unable to determine where he acquired the taste but in the end it didn’t matter.

“Now...as I was saying. Adam Novus is fighting on the account of dozens of people, his friends if you will. He fails to see the bigger picture like we all do. I have defeated my opponents with such little effort because I am attached to nothing. Nothing is holding me back. I do not hold such weaknesses that Adam Novus has. My feelings can not be manipulated because I have none...the only emotion I have, the only feeling that swells inside my stomach is my extreme hatred for the sinners that plague both Earth and Mars. My ambition can not be so easily twisted to other people’s whimsical desire. That is the difference

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between Adam and I, and why I am sometimes surprised that he manages to advance...but that will all come to an end once he meets me in the arena.” Rebel replied.

“Of course...but your next opponent, Zach Orion...he seems to be more dangerous than Adam correct?”

“Zach?... Ah yes, the boy. I have no concern regarding him...more like curiosity. I am looking forward to testing his potential in battle.” Rebel replied taking yet another sip of his chilled wine.

Seina Armana, little was known about him aside from the fact that his bipedal MF, Chronos had helped him advance throughout the tournament. The MF was the first of its kind sporting cannons instead of standard arm units. The elongated grenade cannons were devastating whenever their rounds connected to their target. If that power wasn't enough Chronos was also equipped with ERMs on the back of its torso. The silver hued MF dashed around the crimson beams of energy that were sent out by Alpha. Stephen remained calm as usual, his hands holding onto the throttle in a loose manor, but still tight enough to not slip off. As Chronos sway to the side the elongated cannons acquired a lock on to the agile Alpha.

“I hope you don't expect to hit me with those cannons. It's too slow...” Stephen mumbled under his breath while his eyes stayed focused on the subtle movements of Chronos. The match to this point had been dull, Chronos constantly managed to avoid the beams of energy that Stephen unleashed while remaining defensive and not launching an attack of its own. Finally the two cannons jerked back as they sent out two massive shells. Stephen sighed, the crimson boosters flared towards the side as Alpha narrowly sped around the two shells to Seinā's own amazement.

“Hmpf...you're a speedy MF aren't you...well take this!” Hundreds of ERMs launched violently all heading straight towards Alpha. Stephen cringed at the sight that was now before him, he had never seen so many ERMs launched in a single volley. As he punched the accelerators each chrome warhead ruptured unleashing a devastating rain of energy onto Alpha's location.

“This is going to be interesting...” Stephen mumbled as he broke out into evasive maneuvers. Alpha sped flying towards Chronos on its left side and then switched to flying on its right side. Along with changing sides Alpha also spun around energy beams that flung passed his line of sight. Seinā continued to remain in shock as Stephen managed to fly around dodging the majority of the energy beams. A few beams managed to pound onto Alpha's armor but caused no significant damage.

“He's going to win...is there really any reason to continue watching this?” Adam yawned. He quickly shut up as everyone there just looked back at him with bitter cold expressions.

“All right all right...damn.” Adam replied as he turned his attention back to the screen. He smirked as he watched his brother easily escape damage. He had been hoping for this moment for years, if Stephen would win the current match than he and his brother would meet in the Pre-finals to determine who would go against the winner between Zach and Rebel358. The last time the two brothers faced off was when Adam was an intern at Genesis still training to take the MF exam. Adam smiled at the thought of getting the chance to have a full fledged battle against Stephen. “(You better win...)”

Chronos finally moved out of its stationary position, its golden boosters flickering as it flew towards Alpha. Seinā's hazel eyes blink a few times as drops of sweat managed to run down his face sliding their way into his eyelids. Alpha after exiting the storm of energy grabbed onto its energy boomerangs. First the right arm wound up preparing to throw the weapon. Just as Chronos' grenade cannons fired another dual shell round Alpha's right arm swung launching the energy boomerang into space on a trajectory heading towards Chronos. The boomerang flew around the shells and continued to head towards Seinā while in a curved path. Alpha at the last second boosted upwards avoiding the grenade blast and at that moment threw the second boomerang. Once the boomerang left the crimson hand Stephen tilted his feet harshly onto the accelerator. Alpha exploded out of its position speeding towards Chronos.

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“The hell is that?!” Seina screamed as his radar began to beep wildly. He forced Chronos to turn to the left just as the boomerang scorched past. “Whoa! That was close...huh?” Thinking that the danger was averted Seina slowly turned Chronos around only to see the second boomerang spinning towards his location. His eyes widened and tried to avoid but the boomerang managed to slice through the two grenade cannons causing an explosion that sent Chronos into a fall.

Alpha continued its descent towards Chronos while grabbing the two energy boomerangs and placing them back onto the shoulder blades. Next Alpha ignited its dual energy saber.

“You got lucky on that one!” Seina screamed.

“Luck has nothing to do with it.” Stephen replied calmly as Alpha abruptly appeared in front of Chronos quickly swinging the dual energy saber. The heated beam of crimson energy tore through the head unit and upper half of Chronos’ silver torso. As the beams swept through the armor another crimson explosion ruptured the top half of Chronos spitting out all sorts of debris and electrical sparks. Stephen sighed as he stared back at the floating remains of his opponent; it was a work out, but nothing too strenuous.

“*sigh*...guess I’m going to have to wait until tomorrow to have a real work out.” Stephen mumbled.

“What....what just happened? Did....did I lose? But that’s impossible....how could I have lost...” Seina continued to mutter meaningless rants as he reluctantly watched Alpha slowly fly away back towards the Prosperity hanger.

“Stephen Novus is victorious....he advances to the Pre-Finals.” The same feminine voice announcer for the entire tournament mumbled.

“Well that’s it for today. Think I’m going to go take a nap. You know get a good amount of sleep before the Pre-Finals begin tomorrow.” Adam mumbled as his arms stretched outwards as he yawned.

“What? You’re not going to stay and congratulate your brother on his victory?” Ashley appeared to be puzzled by Adam’s rash decision.

“I guess....but it’s not like I wasn’t shocked or anything. I knew he was going to win, I expected him to win.” Adam replied.

“You arrogant son of....” Ashley was interrupted by Mario’s hand which softly placed itself onto her shoulder.

“Calm down...that’s just how those two act. It’s nothing offensive.” Mario replied.

“I guess...but still.” Ashley replied.

“Adam...you....you did a great job out there. I’m proud of you.” Amy’s voice echoed. Everyone turned around to look at the blushing young girl who was staring at the ground. She had been quiet the entire day and most of them had forgotten that she was even present. Adam began to rub his head in embarrassment.

“Umm...thanks...” He forced himself to say the words, even forced himself to look at her.

“Hey look who’s here!” Mario screamed out breaking the awkward silence that followed. Stephen entered heading towards the group of people. He managed to avoid the group of reporters who had been waiting for each pilot after every match. He stood smirking at his friends.

“Great match Stephen!” Ashley screamed out.

Heather smirked as she elbowed her friend in the gut.

“Ow...what was that for?” Ashley whispered to Heather as her face awkwardly gazed at her friend.

Heather shrugged her shoulders just smiling trying not to chuckle.

“Nothing...” Heather modestly replied.

“Thanks....Seina was a difficult opponent.” Stephen replied in a modest tone of voice.

Everyone paused in order to look at one another and then suddenly began to laugh.

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“Right...come on bro, stop being so modest. We know he wasn't a challenge for you!” Mario screamed.

Stephen just sighed as he glanced towards his brother who was staring with an arched eyebrow.

“What's up with you?” Stephen questioned.

“Heh, you know what this means right?” Adam asked while chuckling.

“Hmm...oh yeah. This means you and I are facing off.” Stephen replied with raised eyebrows.

“Yep...first time in 2 and a half years.” Adam replied as he leaned against the frigid guardrail.

“You think you have what it takes to beat me this time?” Stephen asked sarcastically.

“You guys! Stop it, you're brothers!” Sharon blurted out. She began to approach Adam but Mario extended his arm out to prevent her from advancing any further. She instantly looked up at Mario with her wide eyed innocence. Her brown eyes glistening with the purity that only she knew how to convey.

“They're brothers; it's only natural for them to have some kind of rivalry. It'd be unhealthy if they didn't have one.” Mario replied.

“Ugh...I guess.”

“I think I can take you now.” Adam replied smirking.

“You've gotten a lot better but you're still predictable. I know all of your moves. You won't be able to surprise me once we're out there.” Stephen replied.

“Ha, we'll see. Until then I'm kinda hungry. Let's get dinner.”

Everyone chuckled a bit as they began to head out of the hanger. The tournament was indeed drawing to its conclusion with only 3 matches left with 4 pilots remaining in the upper echelon of all MF pilots.

The crimson MF continued to fly through the air confused about his own existence. His crimson eyes gleamed outwards staring into the azure abyss that made up the majority of the Atlantic Ocean. He sighed as he began to study his hands, the lines that made up the creases on his palm were familiar, everything that sat before him was completely familiar and yet this clone, this artificially created human was unable to put a name to anything remotely familiar.

“What....what am I?” He mumbled under his breath.

He watched as the dirt ridden seagulls flew eloquently across the setting sun. As he embraced himself in the serene scenery his eyes widened at the appearance of two MFs reminiscent of the ones he encounter the prior day.

“Them again...why can't they leave me alone?” He mumbled. His hands once again wrapped around the throttles as he ignited his MF. The silent engine began to move as a crimson beam of light flickered on the head unit.

“Johnson...I'm picking up some movement below. Do you think it could be the target?” The lead pilot mumbled while trying to hide his own fear.

“It's possible....oh my God its moving...it's him! It's the enemy!” Ensign Johnson screamed as the crimson MF sped out from the forest that was currently hiding him.

Ensign Johnson's MF exploded into pieces as the crimson MF sped past slicing through the armor with its own energy lance.

“Oh my God JOHNSON!” The remaining pilot screamed. Suddenly the crimson MF floated in front of the quivering Shade.

“Who am I....and why are you after me?”

“I....you....you're....”

“Do you know me? How do you know me?!” The clone's voice continued to scream. His anger caused a new sensation to trigger in the back of his mind. His eyes began to tremble, his eyelids closing in on his pupils only to open once again.

“I....I....”

You're scared....terrified of me.

"You're scared...terrified of me."

"Yes.....yes...very much so...."

Good...just as I remember it.

"Good...just as I remember it"

The dual layered voice etched itself into the soul of the terrified pilot. Suddenly without warning the Shade exploded into pieces. The singed debris fluttered into the brisk ocean as the crimson MF lingered above.

Hehehehaahaha....now I have some unfinished business to take care of.

"Hehehehaahaha...now I have some unfinished business to take care of..."

Adam and Stephen Novus...

"Adam and Stephen Novus..."

Chapter Twenty-Nine: The Prodigal Child

He wasn't sure how to react; he was just thrilled to have made it as far as he had in the Azure Cup. But now he sat in Hades awaiting his biggest challenge to date, Rebel358 sat luxuriously in Shadow's cockpit not more than 100 meters away. Zach's eyes were quivering from the presence of Rebel, this was the first time he had ever come close to the idolized pilot. He tried to keep his composure but that was difficult knowing that none of Rebel's opponents managed to strike Shadow at least once. Rebel was the type of pilot who just goes beyond any restrictions MF pilots are thought to have. Before

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he managed to strap himself into Hades and flew out to the space arena he listened to Reine trying to boost his confidence. Trying to make it seem like he could defeat the seemingly invincible Rebel358, although Zach knew the truth; that even if he managed to cause stunning upsets in the past that Rebel was way out of his league. Small spurts of frantic breaths caused the plastic visor to fog up in front of his perspiring lips. The digital clock had just reached “10” and was counting down at a much faster pace than he had hoped.

“He’s nervous...heh, maybe I won’t be able to see his full potential this day. Oh well then...at least the tournament is coming to an end. Once this is completed I can get out of Prosperity and deliver the tribulation that humanity has feared for centuries. The time to correct the sins of man is almost upon us.” Rebel softly announced to himself as he readied for battle.

Zach’s hands trembled along side the obsidian throttles while sweat rolled down his temperate skin. The digital clock hit “0” followed by a tremendous punch to his gut. He felt as if all of his air was sucked out from his lungs leaving them dry and useless. His vision was blurred barely able to see Shadow before him. The announcer had already declared the match to begin but his hearing was deafened due to his own embrace of fear. Rebel perked an eyebrow; he wasn’t too shocked to see his opponent cowering in fear. After all Zach was only a 15 year old boy, regardless of his skill and profession as an MF pilot, he was still just a boy.

“Come on boy...I know you’re better than this. Let’s get this going!” Rebel shouted. His shouts incited little to no reaction from the paralyzed boy. Shadow arched forward while the left leg leaned forward, the back thrusters began to flicker slowly at first as they gathered energy. All of this happened in a tenth of a second and then the obsidian and crimson MF shot forward suddenly appearing besides Hades. The right arm of Shadow raised and quickly jerked back as the plasma rifle fired. The crimson beam collided with the front core of Hades knocking the orange MF flipping backwards with no control. Zach still clutched onto the throttles just staring out into the dismal void of nothingness. Rebel cringed, he was still holding back. He truly wanted to test the limits of the boy he had been watching the entire tournament.

“Come on! I’ve seen you fight! This isn’t like you!” Rebel continued to scream hoping to entice Zach to fight back.

“What’s going on? Why won’t he fight back?!” Reine screamed as he leaned over the guardrail in the hanger.

Stephen sighed as did Adam who was leaning against the cold cement layered wall behind the group.

“He’s too scared to feel anything right now.” Stephen replied.

“Scared? But he’s been fighting for so long! How can he be scared all of a sudden? This is the moment he’s been waiting for!” Reine yelled back.

“It’s Rebel...he has that affect on people. Zach is still the youngest competitor in the tournament. All these years of probably being pressured to act like an adult have forced his innocent nature into a ball hidden deep in his subconscious. I think it broke free...he’s reacting like a normal scared child. If this keeps up then he will not have any chance of defeating Rebel...” Stephen mumbled.

“Damn it Zach...you can do this!” Reine screamed.

Zach continued to stare blankly while Shadow continued its onslaught. Plasma round after plasma round exploded onto Hades’ armor causing the MF to spin in circles or flip uncontrollably. Inside the cockpit he was tossed just as much as his machine. And still he remained numb.

“What the hell is it going to take to make you show me your power?!” Rebel screamed. “(Maybe I was wrong about the kid...maybe he isn’t the H-3...ugh, then why am I wasting my time with him. He’s not worth to be an image in my eye...)”

Shadow abruptly grabbed onto the energy saber quickly igniting the agile weapon. Shadow’s left arm arched backwards as the darkened MF dashed towards Hades catching up to the falling MF in a

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matter of seconds. Rebel's moves continued to dazzle the audience, but the star of the show was Zach, even though he wasn't fighting back he had already lasted the longest against Rebel so far.

"(I...I can't possibly beat him...why? Why am I fighting anyway? Is this all that I'm good at? What is the meaning of my existence...I know I'm special, and that there's a bigger purpose in my life but what is it?...should I just give up here?)" These thoughts trailed through his confused mind as time seemed to have slowed down. Shadow's left arm began to descend threatening to strike Hades and end the match. Dozens of mental images shot past his pupils all having significant and unique meanings attached. Life started to flow through the young pilot's veins, his fingers firmly wrapped around the throttle, his eyes suddenly flared open. At the last second Hades flipped around causing its left leg to collide with Shadow's descending arm blocking the attack. As Shadow stumbled back through the void every person watching jumped out of their seats. Zach was the first person to ever block an attack launched by Rebel, an attack that was barely able to be detected by the human eye.

Rebel merely smirked in content.

"Guess I was right all along...now show me your potential." Rebel screamed.

Zach remained quiet as his grey gradient like eyes stared piercing through Shadow. The orange boosters erupted as the MF sped towards Shadow firing the dual plasma rifle. Shadow easily dodged the attacks and moved in to strike Hades with the energy saber but to his own surprise and delight missed. Hades swayed to the right avoiding the attack and once again hit Shadow with its left leg. However Shadow's crimson fingers latched onto the metallic leg preventing it from colliding with the torso. Zach's eyes widened as Shadow's left arm quickly tore through the captured leg. As the energy beam seared through the metallic joints causing an uproar of singed debris to fling out Hades raised the dual plasma rifle at Shadow's core and fired. Shadow was hit by the dual layered energy beam knocking it away from the injured Hades. Rebel began to break out in a nearly silenced laughter.

"Good...this is exactly what I had been hoping for. This is it, that sensation that I've been missing. More...MORE!" As Rebel's intensity increased so did the reaction time and speed of Shadow. With no warning or sign of movement Shadow struck Hades' core leaving a thick gash from the attack. Hades spun around spewing sparks of electricity, Zach cringed, for the first time showing physical emotion while he fell under the influence of his berserker state. Rebel suddenly began to find pure enjoyment in the thrill of the battle. Shadow sped past Hades and once again swung its left arm. The energy beam seared towards the back of Hades' torso, just before the tip of the crimson beam made contact Hades spun around firing the dual plasma rifle. The dual beam of energy burst onto Shadow's left had causes to the energy saber to be deflected. Zach still remaining quiet but breathing heavily gracefully pulled the throttles to the right simultaneously as his feet pressed down onto the accelerator.

Hades abruptly tackled into Shadow with a high velocity causing the obsidian MF to falter. Hades' left arm reached behind the core latching onto the energy scythe and with an accelerated response slashed downward but missed Shadow's core. Rebel continued to smirk as he repeatedly dodged the attacks unleashed by Hades. But with each swing the energy scythe came much closer to connecting with its blow.

"This is what I had hoped to see from you. Unfortunately for you play time is over boy. But be proud in knowing that you are the first one to force me to take things this far..." Rebel mumbled as his fingers began to type vigorously on the obsidian keyboard inside his cockpit. Suddenly text flashing in crimson emanated off the display screen causing Rebel to smile.

Neo System....engaged... The feminine voice alerted.

Hade's left arm once again began the motion to swing the energy scythe but in mid swing as the elbow joint pivoted backwards flames ruptured from the connectors along with an erupting array of electrical sparks. Quickly reacting Hades grabbed onto the energy scythe with the right hand as the left arm discharged from the joints. The force of the blinding explosion forced Hades off balance for a few seconds. Zach's eyes began to move to the side to stare at the severe injury that crippled his left side. His

head began to look frantically around space, he couldn't locate Shadow anywhere. His sense of rationality began to slip in draining the berserker quality.

Suddenly Zach's restraints snapped in two as the young pilot was thrown forward. His orange helmet crashing into the LCD display screen causing it to shatter along with his visor, the translucent plastic shards pierced the skin on his face causing him to bellow out in excruciating pain. Hades now floated with no arms and one leg remaining. Zach's quivering hands lifted from the throttles covering his blood soaked face softly as to not apply pressure to the shards of plastic that now protruded from his skin.

"It was fun while it lasted..." Rebel mumbled softly as Shadow sliced the rail cannon off the torso of Hades. The final explosion sent Hades tumbling through space uncontrollably while Zach continued to scream in agony. The match had ended, not officially but it was clear that Rebel won the match.

The silent monotony that filled Luscious' head office broke into pieces as the sound from his hands colliding with one another in a form of appraisal bounced off the walls. He sat in his charcoal leather chair, his legs comfortably placed onto of his oak desk and with a glass of wine securely placed in his hand. The crimson fluid teetered inside the boundaries set forth by the glass structure.

"Impressive Rebel you've managed to secure your victory...hmpf, to be honest I was curious how this match was going to turn out. At least you've shown me that you're not a complete failure...maybe you will be able to carry out the tribulation. Heh, who am I kidding? You'll fail with your premature rash decision. And after you fail I will remain to pick up the pieces..." Luscious muttered as he slowly took another delicious sip of his wine.

Luscious...Severen is on the line. He says it's urgent.

Luscious smirked as he took his legs off the desk to sit in a more formal position suited for business matters.

"I see...connect him."

Yes sir.

"Luscious...it's happened. A lot sooner than we expected but it's happened, the clone has manifested." Severen said with a shaking voice crackling with fear.

"I see...what happened?"

"The TA sir...well to be specific Vincent Avidus. He sent the TA military on a hunt for the clone and what they considered an unidentified MF."

"Hehehe...repeating history in such a short time, amusing. Did they encounter the specimen?"

"Yes Luscious...first they attacked it with 30 Shades....which he disposed off with little effort. That was right after he managed to escape. And then once again last night, but only 2 Shades encountered him."

"I see..."

"That's not all Luscious, one of the Shades managed to capture a video feed along with an audio recording of the communications link. It was all stored in the black box the military recovered."

Luscious sighed as he reclined back into the leather cushions of his chair.

"How much does the TA know?"

"Nothing...we intercepted the black box before it could make its way to Revelations in Washington."

"Good...so then. Is he exactly as we remembered?" Luscious asked with peaked curiosity

"Depends...if you mean after the encounter with Novus then the answer is no. He is untainted, all read out analysis from the MF suggest that the chip has been reactivated and the hybrid is currently at 95% efficiency."

"Well it's good to know that he's working...but we need to capture him and the Chimera as soon as possible. We can't have a repeat of events otherwise we may never succeed." Luscious replied.

"Understood...but sir, the Chimera is much more powerful now than before. How can we possibly restrain it with the little man power that we have on Earth as is? Especially now with rumors

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about the TA and nuclear weapons. This is going to be much more difficult than we originally thought.” Severen replied.

“Heh, I’m confident that you’ll figure this out Severen. Now if you’ll excuse me the second to last match is about to begin in the tournament and I’d very much like to watch it.” Luscious replied as his index finger smoothly grazed the button cutting off the link.

Severen sighed as he stared back into the shadows.

His eyelids flickered open barely being able to make a clear image. The bright ivory light shun down on him from the cracked and imperfect ceiling. He tried to move his arms to cover his eyes but he felt too weak to even call out for help. Zach lay under the ivory sheets with his face covered in bandages that were stained with his own blood. His fingers began to move up and down as he tried to move even though he knew it was useless.

“Zach you’re awake! Don’t try to move.” Reine’s calming voice emerged into Zach’s current reality.

His dark blue hair began to rustle above his eyes as he stood up from the plastic chair to get a better look at his injured friend.

“Don’t move man....you were hurt....incredibly hurt.” Reine replied as his hand placed itself on Zach’s shoulder.

“I.....lost....” Zach’s muffled voice blurted out.

Reine chuckled slightly while covering his mouth.

“Yeah....but it doesn’t matter. You made it all the way to the Pre-Finals, and you were the youngest pilot in there! You did a hell of a job, better than most other pilots.”

“....I guess....”

“Will you stop worrying about whatever the hell it is that you’re worrying about? Man can’t you just be happy at how far you advanced?”

“You....you won’t understand....” Zach mumbled with his muffled voice tilting his head towards the opposite side of the bed. Reine stared blankly at his friend.

“Zach....”

“Come on! I’ve seen you fight! This isn’t like you!”

Hearing Rebel’s voice echoing like a broken record in the back of his head only caused his minor headache to strengthen to a migraine.

“What the hell is it going to take to make you show me your power?!”

“(What power? Why....why was he so interested in fighting me?)”

His thoughts trailed all confused from the recent events. Never before had anyone been so intrigued by his piloting abilities...or was it something else, Zach couldn’t figure it out nor did he want to. But still, he pondered about what made him stand out in a crowd of a 128 pilots to Rebel.

“(H-3....what....what does that mean?)”

“Are you sure you’re going to be alright?” Sharon’s voice tended to represent everything that was classical and eloquent about a woman. Her distinct smile lit up the darkened cockpit that Adam sat in. Adam nodded as his restraints clicked into locking position.

“You’re not going to take this too far right? I mean he’s your brother....”

“Heh...” Adam mumbled as he shrugged his shoulders. Sharon glared at him menacingly while he continued to ignore her. He was typing vigorously on the keyboard, his mahogany eyes glued to the LCD screen. He wanted to make sure everything was 100% for the upcoming battle. A battle that he had waited over 2 years for.

“Are you listening to me?!” Sharon screamed.

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The abrupt shriek of her voice shook the foundation of his soul causing him to jump up from the seat but still be restrained.

“God....yes....yes, I hear you.”

“Stephen’s your brother, so don’t try and over do it out there.” Sharon replied.

“I’ll be fine....stop worrying.” Adam replied.

“Just promise me you won’t get mad if you lose.” Sharon replied.

Adam smirked as he glanced back at Sharon, his eyebrows arched.

“I won’t...” Adam replied.

“Good....”

“Listen Sharon you should probably head over to the spectators booth with everyone else. I’m about done here and just about ready to launch.” Adam replied.

“Ok....” Sharon leaned forward to kiss Adam briefly before she left. Once her body began to ascend towards the safer platform Adam smiled as he slid down the visor on his helmet. With a few button pushes the cockpit closed encasing Adam in the heart of the metal warrior.

“Heh...I’ve been waiting far too long for this...Adam Novus, Blue Dragon launching!” The cerulean flames lit up as the blue MF launched gracefully out from Prosperity.

As Adam left the hanger Alpha moved into position for launching.

“You’re not going to let him win are you?” Ashley voice emanated from the communications display. Stephen smirked as he glanced over to her radiant face.

“I’m not about to let him do anything.” Stephen replied.

“Umm....not that I’m doubting your abilities or anything. But out of curiosity who won the last time you two faced off?” Ashley asked hesitantly.

“Hehehe....I did...Stephen Novus, Alpha launching!” Alpha abruptly shot out from the hanger leaving a thin barely visible trail of crimson energy.

Ashley began to chuckle as both her and Sharon stared into the abyss.

As Alpha sped out into space the jet like wings that were attached to its torso spread outwards igniting the second set of boosters that were found inside the thin sleekly designed jet pack.

Adam smirked trying to ignore his own nerves as he saw the crimson speck of light that was Alpha and his brother. He took a deep breath as he wrapped his fingers around the obsidian throttles. His feet slowly revving the accelerator in anticipation, his anxiety could hardly be contained.

“So...2 years.” Stephen mumbled.

“Yeah....it’s been far too long since that one time. I will never forget that day....” Adam trailed off as the memories began to cloud his mind.

At the last second as the cerulean blade neared the outer layer of armor Stephen engaged the energy shield. Adam’s blade collided with the shield doing no damage what so ever. The crimson MF’s boosters then ignited forcing itself into the body of the blue MF knocking it off balance. As Adam fell backwards in the sky heading for the ground Stephen quickly stared as hundreds of lock on boxes solidified. Hundreds of missiles dispersed from the shoulders of the crimson MF dashing towards the descending blue MF. Adam broke down, he felt he was doing so good his best even and his brother swatted him away like a common fly. His confidence was shaken; he began to doubt his own abilities regretting even asking his brother for a fight. Every missile launched exploded on its target in various spots all over the machine. Tons of thickly collected smoke burst out from the explosions completely engulfing the blue machine. Stephen hovered above the massive torrent of smoke while awaiting his brother’s next move. The smoke dispersed as the lightning struck the concrete highways underneath the high flying battle area, the blue machine burst out at extreme speeds. A massive thin trail of cerulean energy followed behind the blue MF, Adam reequipped the solid assault rifle lifting it up towards his brother’s machine in the sky. The arm jolted back after each shot fiercely fired from the elongated barrel. Six shells ripped through the clouds towards Stephen. With the slightest strain the crimson machine

strafed to the right and then turned its body to the left watching the bullets stream by.

The blue MF increased its velocity as Adam stepped hard on the accelerator. He continued to fire more shells and Stephen continued to avoid them. Crimson flames ignited from the boosters as Stephen flew towards his brother. At the last second the crimson MF spun around quickly slicing the blue MF's right arm clean off. As the mechanical arm fell to the ground covered in a sea of flames the blue machine swung the left arm with the energy shield still flowing with energy towards the crimson machine. Stephen sighed as his machine caught the blue MF's left arm. With a quick swing the left arm tore off leaving the massive wound with flinging wires shooting out sparks of electricity. There Adam stood with no arms and pretty much out of missiles while his brother remained perfectly intact. The crimson energy blade pointing at the torso of the MF signaled the end of the match. As the simulation went pitch black both pilots removed their helmets stepping out of the artificial cockpits.

“You beat me severely that day...I won't let that happen again...” Adam mumbled.

“You weren't ready when we fought that day Adam.”

“But I'm ready now.”

“I know...and whoever wins this faces Rebel in the finals...”

“Yeah...” Adam replied.

Both of their eyes caught the attention of the digital clock that continued to descend. Both of them smirked as they grasped their throttles tightly.

Ready? GO!

Chapter Thirty: Rematch: Brothers' Destiny

Neither brother waited to give the other the advantage. Both Alpha and Blue Dragon blew out from their position with their laser rifles firing rapidly. Alpha dashed to and fro avoiding the dual laser rifles that Blue Dragon was equipped with while Blue Dragon dashed to from side to side avoiding the high velocity rounds that were equipped in Alpha's weapon. The crimson and azure blurs continued to speed around the shadowy canvas of space at speeds unbelievable by sight. Adam smiled as he pulled the throttles inwards, Blue Dragon sped towards Alpha and then docked the dual laser rifles on the side in order to grab hold of the energy sabers. Stephen smirked and grabbed onto one of the beam boomerangs. Just as Blue Dragon increased its speed Alpha flung the boomerang from the left arm heading towards the right side of Alpha's core. Adam's eyes widened as the beam boomerang quickly dashed towards him forcing him to avert from his path. Blue Dragon swayed to the left allowing the boomerang to pass.

“You're still predictable. Always trying to come up from my right side!” Stephen yelled.

Adam cringed as Alpha dashed towards Blue Dragon now holding on the crimson dual energy saber. Just as the crimson MF neared Adam glanced to the side and jerked the controls forcing Blue Dragon's torso to arch backwards. Just then the beam boomerang shot past Blue Dragon only to be caught firmly in Alpha's metallic hands.

“You...that was close...” Adam sighed in temporary relief.

Alpha crept up onto Blue Dragon while swinging the dual energy saber violently. Adam quickly reacted by swinging his right energy saber. The cerulean beam of energy instantly collided with Alpha's crimson beam of energy found on the upper half of the blade. Sparks ran rampant fluttering out from the two engaging streams of energy causing brightly colored hued lights to flicker reflecting off the armor of

both MFs. Alpha's left hand let go of the dual energy saber and dislodged the lower half of the saber leaving only the one saber engaged with Blue Dragon's. Adam's eyes widened once again as Alpha began to swing the left arm, as Adam cringed; the two thigh cannons on Blue Dragon rose and fired instantly. The two cerulean energy beams blew up on the crimson armor sending Alpha flipping backwards. Adam took a quick breath and sped back on the offensive hoping to not allow Stephen an opportunity to attack. While Blue Dragon boosted towards Alpha Stephen regained stability forcing his MF to quickly flip back into proper position. Just as Alpha began to recover Adam screamed as he lunged forward with the energy saber ignited in the right arm of Blue Dragon. Suddenly Alpha's right leg swung colliding with the blue MF's right arm causing the energy saber to erupt out of the metal hand. Blue Dragon countered by firing the laser rifle on the left arm. The cerulean beam headed towards Alpha's head unit but at the exact last second Stephen forced the head unit to move slightly to the left narrowly avoiding the beam.

"The hell? That's impossible!" Adam screamed.

"Nothing's impossible. You're just too impulsive to realize that." Stephen screamed back. Alpha slashed at Blue Dragon's core with both energy sabers only making contact with one. As the gash flickered with sporadic spheres of electricity Blue Dragon's left leg swung towards Alpha but collided with Alpha's right leg as Stephen moved to block the attack. Adam was furious but refused to let it get the best of him. Once again the thigh cannons lifted upwards and fired. Only this time both of Alpha's energy sabers swung down to block the attack.

"No way!" Adam screamed as he watched his own blast be deflected back towards him. The thrusters rapidly fired as Blue Dragon flew upwards away from Alpha just in time to avoid the attack. Alpha then docked the energy sabers in order to take hold of the energy rifle. The right arm jerked back from the vicious recoil as three crimson beams launched towards Blue Dragon. Adam turned around and easily swatted the beams with his own energy saber that was now equipped on the left arm, it was his last one.

"This is pretty intense so far. Just as I expected it to be." Adam humbly mentioned.

Alpha caught Blue Dragon off guard as it shot up besides the blue MF. The silver fingers grabbed onto the beam boomerangs, one in each hand. As both the left and right hand rapidly descended the beams ignited. Blue Dragon abruptly boosted forward with the head unit leaning at an angle. The blue MF collided with Alpha in turn blocking the oncoming attack. Just as Blue Dragon rushed in Stephen altered his attack and flung the boomerangs out into space. Adam's eyes glanced to the side trying to follow the trajectory of the boomerangs. Blue Dragon's left arm quickly swung inward with the energy saber ignited slashing through the upper layer of crimson armor that platted the torso. Following the attack Blue Dragon swayed to the right as the boomerangs sped past. Just before they could pierce through Alpha Stephen pulled the throttles downwards copying Adam's maneuver a few moments ago. As Alpha arched its torso and the boomerangs flew by slowly losing their momentum Alpha threw one of its energy sabers towards Blue Dragon. As Blue Dragon moved to the side the saber pierced through the left arm joint, the speed at which it was thrown didn't have enough momentum to cause the energy saber to fully slice through the arm.

"Thanks." Adam replied as Blue Dragon's right hand quickly grabbed hold of the energy saber ripping it out from the left arm. As the saber was released Adam quickly ignited it and then forced both his own energy saber and Alpha's together forming a dual saber. Stephen sat amused arching his eyebrow. Wasting no time Alpha flew towards Blue Dragon firing the two cannons lodged between the head unit and the arm units. The lime green energy beams continued to fire at a rapid pace forcing Adam to sprint around the beams focusing on defensive maneuvers rather than offensive.

"I'll admit you've gotten better. But you're still predictable!" Stephen screamed out.

Adam's pupils thinned as Alpha sped at a curved trajectory firing the laser rifle. Blue Dragon dashed to the right but Alpha cut in the same direction in order to counter his brother's attempted escape route. Adam almost froze as he saw Alpha beat him out preparing to swing the energy saber. Relying on instincts alone Adam pushed the throttle forward, just then Blue Dragon's right arm swung upwards with the dual energy saber and collided with Alpha's beam. Once again the two MFs were struggling.

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“Oh my God! Look at those two go!” Mario screamed as he jumped ardently.

“I can barely keep up with them they’re moving so fast!” Michelle replied as she watched in complete awe over the intensity of the battle.

“I just hope they don’t kill each other....” Sharon mumbled quietly while Ashley nodded her head in agreement.

Rebel stood in the darkened corner of the dome as his crimson pupils followed the agile movements of both Alpha and Blue Dragon. He shortly began to chuckle, just watching the match was causing his nerves to stand on end. He knew that either one of them would pose a much harder challenge than Zach did. Both Adam and Stephen were professionals when it came to piloting and MF, then again they also were very well in tune with each other’s abilities and fighting styles so it wasn’t much of a surprise that the match was full of blocking and countering maneuvers. Rebel smiled as he placed his worn down copy of Sun Tzu’s masterpiece snugly folded into his side pocket. His back then leaned against the frigid pale wall behind him while his arms crossed across his chest.

“I am looking forward to either one of you...hehe...”

Alpha’s boosters flared forcing the crimson MF to slowly advance forward pushing Blue Dragon backwards. The crimson energy saber teetered as it rubbed against Blue Dragon’s own cerulean beam. The beams were burning intensely as sparks of distilled energy spurt out randomly lighting up the darkness. Adam struggled to maintain stability as Alpha continued to advance forward.

Stephen began to smile as his right hand pressed a button on the side of the throttle. After his finger relieved the pressure the button began to blink. Suddenly on the other side of space the two beam boomerangs began to blink also, suddenly two thin miniscule boosters on the tips of the boomerangs began to ignite forcing them to move slowly through space until they began to pick up momentum.

Then Blue Dragon’s thigh cannons rose one more time facing Alpha who stood in front of the barrels like the MF was taunting the cannons. As the cannons began to gather energy Stephen smirked one more time and suddenly forced Alpha to boost to the left. The sudden release in pressure caused Blue Dragon to fly forward a few feet. Adam quickly jerked his head and turned around his MF with the cannons preparing to fire. Just as the MF’s torso turned the two beam boomerangs abruptly sliced through the thigh cannons causing them to explode furiously. Adam was shocked, he believed that the boomerangs were long gone and posed him no threat. He was obviously wrong as the two cannons were now slice in half, wires flung violently in space as they spewed rampant sparks of electricity. As the blue MF tried to recover Alpha zoomed through the caliginous clouds of smoke that now emanated around Blue Dragon. With a quick swing the crimson energy saber slashed across the core of Blue Dragon sending it in an uncontrollable spin. Inside the cockpit Adam held onto the throttles tightly while trying to remain still and calm. His hair flapped from side to side, his lungs working excessively as his heart rate jumped up. With every breath his visor fogged up distorting his view.

“Damn...there’s no need for this now.” Adam mumbled as he threw his azure helmet to the ground. “I think now would be a good a time as any....” Adam said under his breath as he engaged the Angel System.

A slight cerulean glow began to circulate around the outer edges of the azure wings. The eight orbital wings sped out from the torso while Blue Dragon continued to fight to regain its stability. Alpha took notice of the oncoming orbital wings and began to fly. Within seconds the wings began to unleash torrents of energy all pounding down onto Alpha. Alpha was hit a few times causing the crimson MF to spiral out of control. As Stephen sighed he realized he couldn’t hold back any longer.

“Adam...it’s been a good match. I am impressed. However all things must come to an end at some point.” Stephen said calmly as he flipped a switch inside Alpha’s cockpit.

Angel System....engaged... The feminine voice alerted Stephen.

Adam shot up from his seat in shock.

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“Did I just hear that right?...You have....you have an Angel system?” Adam mumbled still frozen from the shock. With out warning Alpha blared towards Blue Dragon. Its thrusters flickering powerfully as it caught up to Blue Dragon. As the crimson blur sped through space it continued to dodge the dozens of beams that were rapidly being fired at him from the orbital wings. Adam stared wide eyed at his brother’s advancement. Just before Alpha collided Blue Dragon shifted to the side while docking the energy sabers. In a split second Blue Dragon began to fire relentlessly with the dual energy rifles. And yet Alpha managed to fly around the beams, as Stephen nimbly avoided Adam’s attacks he once again grabbed onto the beam boomerangs and with a quick flick of the wrist threw them both towards Blue Dragon.

“I hope you honestly don’t expect me to fall for that again!” Adam screamed. Suddenly the eight orbital wings flew towards Blue Dragon while firing their cannons. The cerulean energy beams pierced through the thinly armored weapons causing them to explode in the middle of space. Suddenly four of the orbital wings fulminated leaving nothing more than singed pieces of floating metal. As the smoke began to clear Alpha’s ominous frame lingered with its single energy saber flowing vibrantly.

“I can’t believe they’re still going at it!” Mario screamed.

Sharon sighed as she fell into a nearby chair. The battle was raging onward but she had her fill of it. The idea of the two brothers fighting so fiercely bothered her.

“They’ll be fine.” Heather said as she sat down next to Sharon.

“I hope so....but they’re going at it pretty rough out there.” Sharon replied.

“Yeah....well this is who they are. It’s nothing dangerous I swear. Once the battle is over things will be back to normal, I promise. They just have to get this out of their systems, that’s all.” Heather replied.

“Oh my God! Look at that! Damn, I can barely keep up with them!” Mario’s energetic voice boomed loudly.

“*huff* Damn Stephen... *huff*I wasn’t expecting this...” Adam struggled to say as the words loosely fell out from his lips.

“Yeah... *huff*I honestly expected *huff* you to be done by now... *huff* guess I was wrong...”

Both of them were nearly drained completely from the battle. The rate at which they were fighting was amazing, there had yet to be a battle quite like this one in the tournament and every person that watch was enjoying it. Both Blue Dragon and Alpha hovered in mid space, their armor singed and cracked, no longer glistening from the suns’ reflection, but pale and lackluster. Sparks of electricity circulated their MFs due to the damage and gashes that out lined their armor. Blue Dragon slowly oscillated with only 4 orbital wings left while Alpha was missing the lower half of its right leg.

“It’s not over yet!” Adam screamed as he stomped onto the chrome accelerators. The cerulean flames ruptured out from the boosters. The sudden movement caused Stephen to fall back into his seat with his brown eyes widened. Just as Blue Dragon began to move slightly to its left and Alpha’s right Stephen began to chuckle. Adam had always attacked Stephen on his right side, and he refused to change his methods. Just as Alpha prepared to counter Blue Dragon jerked to its right and slashed through Alpha’s left arm unit. Stephen was thrown to the side only to be held in the chair due to the restraints. Adam changed his tactics at the last second, he knew that Stephen would predict his attack to come from the right and would move accordingly. Alpha flipped to the side but quickly regained stability and sped towards Blue Dragon quickly slashing through the 4 remaining orbital wings causing them to explode instantly. The explosion caused Blue Dragon’s wings to burst into pieces while the blue MF tumbled. Adam smiled, it was the second time he was forced to increase the strain on his own body.

Angel System EX Mode....engaged....

He hated to do it since he knew it was come close to crushing his body since it was already exhausted from the heat of the battle. Just as Blue Dragon turned around, Alpha zoomed by one final time

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slashing through the left leg and left arm, as the two limbs fumbled covered in electrical sparks Adam screamed as the energy saber in the right hand ignited. Blue Dragon sped past Alpha quickly slashing through the crimson MF's right arm. The strike caused the right arm to fling violently outwards into space while Alpha hovered missing both its arms and part of its leg. Stephen sighed as he glanced out looking back at Blue Dragon which had just stopped moving.

Adam was panting excessively due to the strain of the system, his insides felt like they were engulfed in a sea of flames. His eye lids flickered while he began to smile.

"I... *cough*I won.... *cough*" His voice began to fade into the dismal silence that was now occupying space.

"Indeed you *huff* *huff* did...you *huff* won..." Stephen mumbled under his breath as he reclined into his seat. The match was over and Adam had managed to take a victory over his brother.

"Hehehe..." Rebel's voice echoed softly inside the dome as the crowd burst out in applause. He too joined in with a slight flick of his wrists, his palms slowly pounded against together as he clapped in amusement.

"Well done Adam....although it looks like our final match is going to have to wait since your MF has taken quite the amount of damage...Oh well, I want you in top form when we face off. Hehe...amusing indeed." Rebel smiled, his trench coat fluttered in the air as his torso abruptly turned. He slowly walked out of the dome leaving the crowd shouting like a pack of animals.

A maintenance team was required to head out into space to retrieve both Alpha and Blue Dragon. Both machines were in shamble, unable to move on their own. Alpha's cockpit slowly opened as Stephen floated out in the gravitation-less environment. Sharon jumped up from her chair the minute she saw Blue Dragon being hauled into the hanger. Her mahogany hair slowly floating waving in the air as her body headed towards Blue Dragon. The MF was motionless, the cockpit had yet to open and that caused her concern. She felt it in the pit of her stomach, that pain, she knew he over did it again pushed himself to the breaking point. Just as she reached his frigid damaged core Stephen's hand held her back as he began to open Blue Dragon's cockpit. Sharon clutched onto Stephen shoulders as she nervously waited for the cockpit to be revealed.

As the cockpit doors slid opened Adam's eyes began to slowly blink. He was awake and once he saw his brother he simply smiled. Stephen extended his left hand towards his barely conscious brother. Adam chuckled and slightly tapped Stephen's hand with the palm of his right hand. It was his way of showing his gratitude for the match.

"ADAM! YOU IDIOT!"

Adam cringed and smiled as Sharon moved past Stephen entering the damp cockpit. Adam didn't move, he couldn't even if he wanted too. Sharon just smiled innocently as she wrapped her arms tightly around Adam's weakened body. Adam's eyes thinned and cringed from the slight amount of pain that he felt, but he chose to ignore it as best he could. Tears began to pour out from Sharon's eyes. The drops slid down her cheeks pouring onto Adam's azure jumpsuit.

"You had me so worried!" Sharon blared.

"I... *cough* ...know...I'm sorry..." Adam mumbled.

Stephen smiled and then began to float away from Blue Dragon's cockpit. He glanced above to see Ashley, Mario, Michelle and Heather smiling towards him. His body eloquently rose towards the chrome guardrail where Mario extended his arm to help lift his friend.

"Bro that was one of the best matches I have ever had the privilege of watching....good job." Mario said as he shook Stephen's hand.

"It was fun..." Stephen humbly said. His eyes glanced over to Ashley who was standing next to Heather being quiet which was a first for her. "Sorry I didn't win." Stephen said speaking to Ashley.

"Eh, it happens. I thought you did a great job regardless..."

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“Thanks...listen...” Before Stephen could finish his sentence Ashley’s arms began to wrap around his neck pulling him closer. Her green eyes began to look away from Stephen’s face while her cheeks began to blush.

“I know...” Stephen modestly replied as the two remained embraced. Their heads tilting towards each other until their lips connected.

“Bout time...” Heather mumbled under her breath.

“So....” Sharon muttered.

“So...” Adam replied.

“You got your wish it looks like.”

“What do you mean I got my wish?”

“I mean you’re going to get your shot at Rebel.”

“Oh...yeah, that.”

“What’s wrong? I thought that’s what you wanted.”

“*sigh* It is....but I’m not sure what’s going to happen.....” Sharon cut him off. Her fingers softly taking hold of his chin while turning it to face her.

“We’ve talked about this. It doesn’t matter; I’ll always be here by your side to protect you....”

“Sharon...” The two became silent as their lips interlocked. They continued to kiss and remain embraced in the safety of Blue Dragon’s cockpit.

Back on Earth the crimson MF, Chimera continued to fly through the ivory clouds. The cloned pilot stared at the display screen that was playing video footage of the final Pre-finals match. The pilot smirked as he stopped the video at a close up of Adam Novus.

So brother...you’re in space...

“So brother...you’re in space...”

Chapter Thirty-One: The Frigid Sense of Winter

Vincent Avidus loomed glaring out his office window. It was raining heavily in Washington, the frigid droplets of water beat rhythmically onto the ground while people went about their daily business holding umbrellas or books above their heads. Vincent smiled; he was preparing to protect this nation and the people who compose it. The silent acquisition of the TA was in his mind the best deal he ever made. Revelations was making billions of dollars with their Shade line and now had full control of their usage. Technically the board of Revelations which mainly composed of elderly nobility had power over the Trinity Alliance and their branches in London and Quebec, but the truth was that Vincent had complete undisputed control. He was the youngest and most intimidating member of Revelations filled with dreams of his own ambition.

The war had slowly begun to drag against his will, battles weren't breaking out as often as he would have liked. His hands rustled in his pants pockets while he walked over to his desk. On top of the wooden desk were scattered pieces of paper all of which were reports from Revelations in regards to a new weapon he ordered for development. As his right hand picked up the sheet of paper that was on top of the clutter he began to smirk thoroughly pleased.

"The war will end, and once it ends I'll have complete authority over the main governments of the world...heh, I must admit I didn't expect it to be this easy." He began to laugh subtly; suddenly the knob on his dull gray door began to turn as the door itself creaked open.

"Sir...we've just received a report that the TA Naval Fleet along with the USMF, and the USAF have finally made their way to the North Sea just outside of the Netherlands and Germany. What are your orders?"

Vincent smiled as he looked back at his young secretary. Her glowing bright red hair and tiny freckles that covered her blushing cheeks, she wasn't a bad sight to look at.

"My orders? I don't think my orders are any mystery. Tell General Copiare to launch the Shades, and to make sure that the package is guarded." Vincent replied grinning as he slowly sat back into the comforts of his chair. Thunderous sounds echoed amongst the sky while thin bursting streams of lighting struck the ground.

His crimson hair blurred his vision while he sat in the constraints of his Viper's cockpit.

"Carlos any idea just what the hell we're doing here in EAP territory?" Anthony questioned breaking the silence.

"I'm sure we're going to find out soon enough. I highly doubt that Avidus dragged us all the way down from Mars to go on vacation..." Carlos replied.

"A vacation sure sounds really nice right about now." Eric replied.

"Unfortunately we're not going to get a vacation until this damn war is over....and I think that's what this is about..." Anthony said sullenly.

Both Eric and Carlos glanced over their shoulders looking back at Anthony and his chrome Viper.

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“I hate the fact that we’re down here, on Earth fighting. On Mars is one thing, there’s no real civilian issue, but down here, there’s civilians everywhere...and if I think we’re about to do what I think we are then I can’t imagine how many innocent lives are in danger...”

“You’re right Anthony...civilian casualties are definitely at risk. But there’s nothing we can do about that now.” Eric replied.

Carlos sighed; he too despised the idea of commencing an operation clouded with so many rural areas. The fact was that while the war was public knowledge it was all transpiring so far away, every person on Earth felt disconnected with the war since it was on Mars, but now that it was about to be dragged to Earth reality was about to become a heck of a lot scarier. Since England was on the edge of the North Sea it wasn’t too suspicious to see a TA naval fleet floating over the ocean waves.

“Military action is important to the nation, it is the ground of death and life, the path of survival and destruction, so it is imperative to examine it...” Carlos muttered under his breath. Both Eric and Anthony looked back at their Red Fury commander confused.

“Commander...”

“What should we really be doing? Should we be spending more time examining the validity of this war and try to find out where it’s taking us? Or should we just shut up and obey orders...the life of a soldier is a difficult one.” Carlos replied.

Suddenly the alarms began to sound; it was time for the operation to begin, although most of the soldiers weren’t aware of the operation’s true goal. Aside from Red Fury no other USAF squadron was present; they were expected to be skilled enough to get the job with 3 Vipers. 2 battalions of Shade units were preparing to launch from the carrier, 30 units in all.

“Commander Redentore please launch...your only objective is to protect the crimson Shade unit which holds the Titan....do everything in your power to make sure that unit is protected...” General Copiare’s voice trailed. By the tone of his voice it was apparent that he had his own reservation about the operation; Operation Omega.

“General? What’s going on...” Carlos asked even though he knew the General was not bound to give him full details.

“Carlos...just, once the Titan is in free fall make sure you and you’re team gets the hell out of there...”

“Huh? You’re not making any sense...General, are we attacking Berlin?” Carlos asked, he knew that Berlin was the location for the EAP’s central government.

“Yes...just make sure you guys get out of there...Get at least 12 Km away from the drop point.”

“12 km...General?” Just then the communications link closed leaving Carlos stranded in the shadows of deceit.

“Commander? Is everything alright?” Eric asked.

“Just...just launch.” Carlos replied.

The collective sound of the thrusters and boosters ignited boomed into the sky with a loud but soft humming sound. The knee joints on the Shades bent as each unit launched into the crimson tinted sky. The sun was setting slowly as darkness prepared to sweep over the area, an ideal time to strike. Reluctantly Carlos’ Viper flew into the sky followed by Eric and Anthony. Red Fury began to fly in their typical “V” pattern just behind the steadily flying Shades. In the middle of the Shade was the crimson MF holding onto a single massive launcher that was attached to the back of the torso and swung just under the right arm facing forward.

As the TA soldiers continued to advance alarms immediately began to roar in all EAP nations in the area, mainly the Netherlands and Germany. EAP politicians were shocked to even think of an attack on Earth, one that in their opinion was completely unwarranted. Most believed that the war would never spread to Earth, but they were wrong. Soldiers began to scramble from the military bases at Den Helder in the Netherlands and Aurich in Germany. Berlin even though it was the location of the EAP central

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government was not equipped with any Night-Wings or any other EAP weapon. As the sleekly designed Night-Wings dashed into the sky holding onto their standard plasma rifles the TA fleet continued its path.

“Here we go. Shades disperse and intercept the enemy targets. Red Fury along with the Titan Shade will continue towards Berlin flying over Bremen in a straight path to the EAP central HQ. We only get one shot at this so don’t fail!” General Copiare bellowed. In the pit of his stomach he knew this was wrong, but since Revelations, specifically Vincent Avidus was in command he had little choice.

It only took a few seconds for the battle to start raging onwards. The Night-Wings had a clear advantage since they were designed for aerial combat and the Shades were just equipped with flight packs to be able to battle in the air. The 30 Shades quickly broke away from the Titan Shade all flying towards the oncoming 40 units of Night-Wings just deployed.

“Alright, while they deal with the Night-Wings we need to make it to Berlin....” Carlos began to calculate their current speed and the distance to Berlin on the control panel. “According to our current speed we should make it to Berlin in just less than 15 minutes. That’s 15 minutes of baby sitting. Now let’s go!”

“Roger.” Both Eric and Anthony replied.

The Vipers swung around towards the Titan Shade, with Eric on the right, Anthony on the left and Carlos in front. Their turbines constantly creating enough thrust to keep their current speed, while they began to separate from the group two Night-Wings began to lock onto them.

“Crap, I’m locked....need to shake them from my tail!” Eric screamed.

“Got them.” A random Shade pilot screamed. Suddenly a Shade sped past the two Night-Wings while firing its energy rifle. The crisp crimson beam pierced through the two angular thrusters extending from the shoulders of the EAP MFs causing them to spiral towards the water below. Both Night-Wings crashed into the violent waving water. The collision sent a pillar of water to thrash into the air a few meters high. Eric sighed, he felt some what relieved that he was saved.

The battle treaded on, dozens of blinding explosions filled the sky along with thunderous sounds piercing the hearts and souls of the people who lived in the towns nearby. Chrome debris flung towards the ocean as Shades and Night-Wings alike fell from flight. Unfortunately for the EAP the 40 Night-Wings sent out was all that they could produce, the majority of their MFs were on Mars which now appeared to be a bad decision. Red Fury and the Titan Shade successfully made it to Germany. Hundreds of thousands of people stood on their roofs watching as the mysterious grouping of machines zoomed over their city.

“General!...” One Shade pilot screamed as his MF was sliced in half by a passing Night-Wing. The explosion taking his life in an instant, that very Night-Wing suddenly exploded. Another Shade sped out from the smoke that was created from the explosion. Husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, Wives, mothers, sisters and daughters were separated from their family as their lives were abruptly taken from existence. Each one reminiscing of their entire life in a tenth of a second, war was truly an abomination. While the MFs continued to clash over the raging ocean Vincent Avidus continued to smile as he watched due to a live satellite feed.

“Where is the Titan?” Vincent abruptly asked. His question caused the few military personal in the room to jump up from their seats.

“Ummm...one second. Just let me pull up the data from its radar device....umm...here we go, they are now passing over Brandenburg. They should arrive at the drop point within 5 minutes.”

“5 minutes....guess I can wait a little longer than. How is our fleet doing?”

“Not too good sir, they’re down to 4 Shades, we’re still out numbered by the EAP. They have 6 Night-Wings remaining.”

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“Whatever, I don’t care. They’ve already served their purpose. The Titan can’t be stopped now. It’s just a matter of time.” Vincent replied taking his seat.

“Commander...we’re nearing the Berlin limits.” Anthony said.

Carlos began to feel sick; the nausea wasn’t something he was used to. Even though he didn’t know what was going on from a soldier’s perspective, he knew that it wasn’t good. He had his own theories, none of which he had actually thought would come to fruition. Suddenly his display screen lit up with the image of the Titan Shade’s pilot.

“Thanks...you’ve done your job now head back otherwise you might get caught in the explosion.”

“Explosion...what the hell are we dropping?!” Anthony screamed back.

“The RV-X666-TITAN...a fission bomb utilizing Uranium-235...” The Shade pilot barked back.

Immediately each of the pilots froze, they never dreamed that the TA would be dropping a nuclear bomb on Berlin. It seemed barbaric and completely drastic in their opinion. Anthony struggled with his quivering fist inside his cockpit. He never fathomed the evil of the TA, or just the evil that dwelled inside of mankind to reach this extent.

“Damn it! Commander we have to stop this!” Anthony screamed back.

“...There’s nothing...there’s nothing I can do.” Carlos replied.

“Sir...we can’t let them drop a nuke on Berlin! That’s...” Eric was cut off by Carlos. “It’s an ORDER!...” Carlos screamed back. It hurt him deeply that he couldn’t do anything about it that he would have to watch around 3 million people die.

“I...I can’t watch this.” Anthony screamed as he pulled on the throttle. His Viper’s engine began to pump out an increase in propulsion sending the aircraft farther forward. Just as he felt that he was just in his decision he forced his Viper around locking onto the Shade. Both Eric and Carlo’s eyes widened, Anthony was too enraged to even think about the consequences of his action.

“You idiot! If you fire then you’ll kill us all!” Eric screamed.

Anthony began to breathe heavily as the Shade sped past. He wanted to go after it but his senses began to calm him down as much as a person in this situation could be calmed down.

“If you want to do something about this...then we’ll do something about this. But on a larger scale. If you attack the Shade then you will most likely trigger a nuclear explosion killing us and the people below us...” Carlos replied.

“So what the hell are we supposed to do? Just watch 3 million people die!”

“No...let’s get out of here. I want nothing to do with Vincent Avidus or the TA...not anymore.” Carlos replied sullenly.

“What are you saying?” Eric said as he glanced over his shoulder.

“I’m leaving this army...probably going back to Mars. If I stay here on Earth I’m sure I’ll be court martialed. But they won’t bother to look for me if I’m on Mars...” Carlos replied as him and the other two Red Fury pilots continued to fly away from the Shade.

“I’m going with you...I hate the TA...” Anthony replied.

“I see...I’m not sure what I’m going to do once I’m up there though.”

“...why don’t we try and find other soldiers who feel the same way we do?” Anthony questioned.

“And what? Start a rebellion?” Carlos replied sarcastically.

“Ummm...yeah. I’m sure they’re soldiers on both the TA and the EAP who feel the same way. We can fight off both of them and save Mars from becoming tainted by the sins of humanity.” Anthony replied.

“Well...I guess it’s worth a shot. I mean what else can happen to me? What about you Eric?” Carlos asked.

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Eric had thought it over, although he didn't like the idea of not being able to see any of his friends and family, he needed to fight for what he believed in.

"Yeah...I'm in." Eric replied.

Suddenly the ground shook as a vehement sound shattered their ears. They knew what it was and they refused to turn around to look at the tragedy. They just kept on going hoping to escape their own sins.

The massive bomb exploded a few meters above Berlin causing a radioactive shockwave to engulf the city. Buildings were wiped from the ground; the heat incinerated the structures along with any unlucky soul to still be on the street. There was no point in warning the citizens; there was no time to escape the range of the highly destructive bomb. As the towering mushroom cloud roared hundreds of meters into the sky the entire world sat in awe. Signals were cut leaving Berlin engulfed in radiation and flames. The flames engulfed the rummage of building; nothing was left in existence at ground zero. The ground was singed emanating death, the further away from ground zero the less damage, but the damage was still severe. Just on the border of Poland, 70 KM away from the city that was wiped from existence people fell to the ground, tears running down their faces completely appalled with the actions of the TA. Life was extinguished from Berlin, the death toll in the millions, nearing the 3 plus million people who occupied Germany's capital city.

"It's done..." One of the military personnel said softly. He was still in shock over the order; he could barely comprehend the actual attack.

Vincent grinned devilishly while rocking back and forth in his chair which sat at the front of the elongated table.

"Vincent...what...what have we done?" One of the elders of Revelation mumbled.

"We've initiated the final phase of this war. Soon it will all be over....Use anger to throw them into disarray..." Vincent mumbled.

"What?...anger....what are you talking about?"

"It's so simple. The EAP will be sent into a fit of rage. And when people, especially military factions are swallowed by anger they become clumsy and prone to defeat. That is exactly what I just did." Vincent replied.

"Vincent! Do you have any idea how many people lived in Berlin!?"

"About 3,393,933...am I close?" Vincent replied.

"...no....that's exactly correct..." The elder replied.

"Well if you are done ranting about the past, then I'd suggest we look to the future of this war. I want the remaining naval fleet to station at Sunderland on England territory. There they will await further orders and will resupply." Vincent replied.

"Vincent...what have you done..."

"Adam...we need to talk..." Stephen muttered as Adam continued to watch the mechanics working on the repairs for Blue Dragon. They had been working on it for about 2 days now and were almost done. Once they finished he would have to face Rebel in the Azure Cup Finals, something he had been waiting for the entire tournament.

"Yeah what's going on?" Adam asked. He turned around, his brown hair flowing through the air. Stephen just looked back at his brother blankly. His eyes rolling down at the cracked pavement under their feet, he wasn't sure how to tell him the news.

"The TA has already made their final move against the EAP..." Stephen started.

"Huh? What happened?"

"Adam, maybe we should talk somewhere else, in private." Stephen replied looking back at Sharon who was quietly standing behind Adam wearing a radiant smile like always.

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“Oh...” Adam replied as he glanced back at Sharon. “Hey, I’ll be right back. Make sure those guys finish quickly.”

“Ok.” Sharon modestly replied.

Adam and Stephen began to walk out of the MF hanger. Once they left the hanger they entered the corridor which connected the hanger to the main living quarters and lounge. Stephen began to sigh as he leaned forward, his hands resting on the thin rail which ran on the wall. His eyes began to wander to the outskirts of space as he stared at the rotating Earth.

“So what’s going on Stephen?” Adam asked.

“Berlin...it’s gone Adam.” Stephen replied.

“What?!” Adam jumped back colliding into the opposite wall from the shock. He knew Berlin was the EAP’s central HQ. But just the idea of Berlin being attack frightened him, which alone meant the war was slowly moving to Earth. But the fact that it was gone brought a whole new level of fear. “What do you mean it’s gone?”

“I mean it’s gone. The TA dropped a fission bomb on Berlin...everything within a 15 km radius was destroyed.”

“A nuke...they dropped...a nuke...How many people died?”

“Adam...”

“No, I want to know.”

“Ugh...around 3.4 million...” Stephen reluctantly replied.

Adam became eerily quiet, his eyes quivering at the thought of being up in space while the war was becoming extremely chaotic. His fist began to shake rapidly as his anger swelled.

“There’s nothing we could have done...Vincent Avidus has complete control over the TA right now. Once we go back...”

“What? What are we going to do when we get back? This war is getting far too out of control. I’m going to put a stop to it.”

“Oh really? And how do you plan on doing that?”

“I...I don’t know...” Adam muttered, he hated admitting the fact that he didn’t know what to do.

“Listen, right now you need to focus on the tournament and Rebel. I’m afraid this might turn out to be a nuclear war; we’re going to need to stop the war before it gets to that point. I’ll try and talk to other military Generals and see if we can get Avidus out of power and put someone honorable to take the position. Right now that’s all we can do..”

“...fine...but he’ll pay. Vincent Avidus will pay for this...” Adam mumbled as he walked into the hanger. Sharon’s eyes lit up the minute he entered the two then embraced. She hugged him tightly as he just stared at Blue Dragon.

Rebel smiled sitting in the corner of his room. The television screen still flickering.

“It has finally begun. I will make sure humanity does not survive...” He mumbled as he broke out into a surrealistic laughter. A laughter that coldly echoed throughout the inner layers of Prosperity while Luscious smirked taking a final sip of his Merlot.

Chapter Thirty-Two: Gleaming Twilight

The anticipation couldn't have been any higher than it was at the moment. Although the mood was severely dampened due to the nuclear bombing of Berlin the tournament proceeded as scheduled. The final match was preparing to begin shortly following a moment of silence to mourn those who were lost in the bombing of Berlin. News stations were bombarded with phone calls from concerned people from all over the world, all of which had the same comment to say, all condemning the Trinity Alliance for their actions and declaring them evil and murderers. It was clear that the world even some nations within the TA were starting to doubt the credibility of their own governing faction.

"This is crazy what's been going on....are you sure you're fine to go through with this match?" Sharon asked.

Adam's eyes slowly opened as he sat in Blue Dragon's cockpit listening to her talk through the communications link.

"Yeah...I can't push this off. Once this tournament is over I'm going back to Earth to try and find a way to fix things." Adam replied.

"Fix things? You're one person; you can't expect to harbor all of this on your shoulders..."

"I know...but if I'm done there, back in the war then I'll be able to do something."

"Do you honestly believe that?"

Adam sighed, he wasn't sure if he did indeed believe that. There was a time when he was thrilled to be part of the military, to be able to help guide humanity to a better future. But seeing how things were turning out now he wasn't too sure if he was doing the right thing, or what he should be fighting for. There were too many things bothering him, his brother, Nick and Chimera and why he was chosen for the project years ago. Then the manipulation of his parents to create his MF, and then there was the clones that Genesis was producing. None of it made much sense to him, and on top of that now he had to deal with knowing that over 3 million innocent people had lost their lives in an instant. No one had the right to judge when people were to die.

"I'm not sure what I believe in anymore Sharon....all I know is what I can do. And I can fight..."

"Fighting is good and all but what are you fighting for? I think that is what you need to figure out before jumping to any rash decisions."

"I know....thanks. Just pray for me today ok? I'm going to need it." At times it felt like he wasn't about to go and finally face Rebel after all that time had passed. 128 pilots reduced to 2, it was expected to be a climatic end for the Azure Cup.

"You know I will....do your best."

"I will..." Adam replied smiling back to Sharon. As Sharon placed the headset on the table Amy abruptly appeared behind her.

"I heard you have the nightmares as well..."

"What are you talking about?" Sharon asked turning away from the vibrant clone of the original Amy Caecus.

"The nightmares....you know I have them too....and they fester deep within my stomach. Sometimes I feel empty, but when I think of the nightmares I feel....human. Like I belong here..."

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“And that’s why you wish to stay with Adam....because you think by being around him you can have some sort of emotion. An emotion that makes you feel like you’re something you’re not.”

Amy nodded. “Yeah....I just feel like I’m supposed to follow him....I don’t know what it is though.”

Sharon shrugged her shoulders.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’d like to personally welcome you here to the live presentation of the final duel of the Azure Cup Tournament. It has been an exciting month and a half and now it is coming to an end. The winner of this match will be labeled the strongest MF pilot on both Earth and Mars. I hope you have all enjoyed your stay here at Prosperity for those of you who have been living here. And I hope those of you at home have been enjoying the tournament. I would like to say that I am deeply shocked and appalled by the Trinity Alliance’s rash decision. I feel that it was unjust, and I would like now to have yet another moment of silence for the millions in Germany that have died....” Luscious slowly became quiet bowing his head in prayer. The rest of the pilots and spectators on Prosperity followed suit along with the people living back on Earth. The moment lasted about a minute and Luscious picked up his microphone once again. “Thank you all....and now without any further a due, the final match of the Azure Cup!” He sneered while he walked off the center platform in the middle of the dome with a group of advisors on his side.

“Is it done?” Luscious mumbled.

“Yes...the walls surrounding Utopia have been lifted.”

“Good....I want the clones, all of them transferred there ASAP. We might have to deal with things a lot sooner than expected.”

“Yes sir.”

The nerves began to build up with full intensity as Adam realized it was his time. Rebel and Shadow had already launched during Luscious’ speech to the public; it was now his time to launch.

“*sigh* Adam Novus....Blue Dragon launching....” The azure MF took off into space as its thrusters and boosters ignited. The cerulean glow lit up the dark gloomy hanger as the MF moved about. Stephen, Sharon, Mario, Ashley, Michelle and Heather stood at the edge of the hanger all watching as Adam headed out to meet with his opponent.

“Do you think he’ll be alright?” Sharon asked looking up to Stephen.

“We won’t know until the match begins....I’d like to think that he’s ready for this.” Stephen replied.

“I know what you mean....that Rebel; he’s something not from this world. I never met a pilot as intimidating as he is.” Mario replied.

“Adam....” Sharon sighed.

Rebel smirked as he placed his book to the side once Blue Dragon made its appearance.

“And here I was getting worried that you wouldn’t show up.” Rebel sarcastically said.

“It would have been extremely foolish of me to not have shown up after everything I went through to get here. We settle this today.” Adam replied. He was trying to boast confidence that he knew he didn’t possess. His fingers were trembling along the throttle edges as he stared once again at the beast known as Shadow. Its obsidian armor nearly fading completely into the space black drop, he knew he had a challenge on his hands.

“You see exhausted Adam. Are you sure you’re ready to go through with this?”

“I’m fine. Let’s just get this over with.”

“I see...when your forces are dulled, your edge is blunted, your strength is exhausted, and your supplies are gone, then others will take advantage of your debility and rise up. Then even if you have wise advisers you cannot make things turn out well in the end...” Rebel remarked.

Adam squinted confused. “What are you talking about?”

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“Basically to sum it up, you’re exhausted and your head isn’t in the game. And even if you have friends who are knowledgeable and support you, you’ll still lose.” Rebel replied.

“I’m fine...”

“We’ll see.”

The clock suddenly hit zero, the match was to begin.

“Indeed we will!” Adam screamed not wasting a second to get the match started. Blue Dragon exploded firing the dual laser rifles which Shadow easily avoided by swaying to the right. Rebel smirked, he knew Adam was waiting for the match, but he wasn’t expecting him to erupt with such intensity.

“Good, you’re serious about this match. Then maybe I’ll finally get a satisfying match.” Rebel screamed back.

Adam cringed, waiting for the moment when Rebel would attempt to grab the advantage. Suddenly the crimson boosters equipped on Shadow began to ignite and the obsidian MF took to flight. Adam continued to fire both energy rifles, each arm jolting back and forth from recoil as each round of energy fired. Shadow deflected each beam with its energy saber which was equipped in the left hand. Blue Dragon docked the energy rifle in the left hand replacing it with an energy saber that ignited instantly. Rebel smirked and increased the velocity of Shadow. Shadow quickly vanished from sight like it did in so many of its previous matches. Adam managed to calm his nerves and began to smile. Suddenly Blue Dragon jerked around slashing the left arm through the vacuum of space. To everyone’s amazement the searing beam of energy collided with Shadow’s own energy beam that flung downwards. Sparks of electricity shot out as the two MFs struggled against one another with their energy sabers connected.

“Impressive, you’re the first to ever counter that attack.”

“It’s not that difficult when you do it to every one of your opponents. It was just a matter of me learning your moves and timing them. I will defeat you!” Adam screamed. Rebel’s eyes widened once Blue Dragon exploded with energy once the boosters flared. The blue MF began to push Shadow back while Rebel remained attached to the throttles trying to over power the energy beam emanating from Blue Dragon’s weapon. Next the two thigh cannons pivoted upwards and fired two immense plasma beams. Shadow was hit by the unrelenting beams of energy. As the dark MF flung backwards Blue Dragon sped forward with its left arm arching backwards preparing to strike.

“Heh...not bad...” Rebel replied calmly, he then jerked the throttles hard. Shadow suddenly spun around and then unleashed two rounds from the plasma rifle onto Blue Dragon. The two thickly coated fuchsia beams dispersed outwards into space once it came in contact with the azure torso. The brunt of the beams knocked Blue Dragon off its path of trajectory. Shadow then moved with such grace and eloquence that it demanded appraisal. Adam’s eyes shot open as Shadow abruptly appeared at his side and slashed the core with the energy beam. The radiated beam of energy cut through a good amount of armor spraying out singed metal debris. Adam was jerked around in the cockpit due to the force of the attack. Blue Dragon’s boosters then ignited on the right leg of the MF causing it to kick Shadow on the side of the torso causing the MF to be sent spiraling away.

“I told you I won’t lose to you. I can’t lose!” Adam screamed

“You can’t...this is a tournament Adam. Nothing drastic or devastating will come if you lose. Unless you can’t stand losing...or is it that you can’t stand being an inferior being?!” Rebel shouted.

“Shut up! I don’t want to hear your voice anymore!”

Blue Dragon zoomed towards the spiraling Shadow while firing the right armed energy rifle. The cerulean glowing beams of energy consistently hit their target causing Shadow to spiral at an even higher velocity.

“You’ve definitely come a long way. But still, your skill leaves something to be desired.” Rebel replied.

“What?!” Adam screamed back while he continued to fire the energy rifle. His attacks were becoming sporadic and careless and it showed. Shadow regained its stability and shot back towards Blue Dragon. Rebel held onto the throttles while his MF moved at high speeds eventually running into Blue

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Dragon sending it flying backward. Shadow then shot to the left at a curved angle and continued to zoom by the out of control Blue Dragon. Adam cringed as he watched Shadow speed past.

“Erg...no you don’t!” Adam screamed. The Angel System suddenly activated as a cerulean glow began to emanate around the azure wings. Rebel smiled as he headed straight for the back of Blue Dragon with Shadow’s arm preparing to strike with the energy saber. The eight wings launched and began to lock onto the moving Shadow. Shadow was thrown off balance as each orbital wing began to pound heavily onto the obsidian armor. Each time Shadow tried to strike a wing it would just nimbly move away. As Rebel’s attention was kept by the orbital wings Blue Dragon appeared slamming both of its energy sabers together. The right arm flung to the side igniting the dual energy saber and abruptly slashed upwards at a 45 degree angle. Rebel’s eyes widened from the attack, he failed to realize that Adam recovered and managed to move Shadow out of the way. However the cerulean beam of energy emanating from the lower side of the beam sliced cleaning through Shadow’s lower left leg. The leg exploded into pieces of debris as chrome wires fluttered in space constantly spewing out electrical sparks.

“Oh my God...did you see that? He hit Shadow! Someone actually hit Shadow!” One spectator announced as he jumped out from his seat in the dome. Everyone pilot and non-pilot alike stared mindlessly at the screen, all feeling a heightened sensation of anxiety. They felt like they were the ones fighting for the glory of being deemed the strongest MF pilot. And the match continued on, blaring lights emanating from the explosions created from collisions between Blue Dragon and Shadow. It was indeed the match of their lives.

“You’re doing a lot better than I had hoped...this battle is without a doubt the most satisfying one I have ever been in!” Rebel screamed as he slashed with the energy saber but missed. Blue Dragon countered by firing the dual plasma cannons as Shadow’s torso lunged forward leaving a spot open for attack. The dual cerulean plasma beams erupted on the outer layer of Shadow forcefully sending it in the opposite direction.

“You’re talking a lot more than usual during a match! It’s making you vulnerable!” Adam screamed back.

“On the contrary...”Rebel replied as the crimson boosters ignited and Shadow sped towards Blue Dragon quickly slashing through the right thigh cannon and grazing the right side of the torso just under the arm joint. As electricity began to spark a minor explosion occurred that sent Blue Dragon tumbling. As Shadow began to turn around in order to finish the job the orbital wings once again began to fire relentlessly. Rebel cringed as the dozens of cerulean beams impeded his descent. He then began to fire the plasma rifle in all directions as Shadow’s boosters moved at an angle causing the MF to start spinning in place while firing the rifle. Suddenly beams of plasma energy began to fling out in all directions and at all angles, the orbital wings began to move in attempts to avoid the attacks but some were unsuccessful. 2 orbital wings were engulfed in the beams and exploded instantly while the other six quickly returned to Blue Dragon docking on the back of the torso.

Just as Shadow began to stop spinning it was hit by dozens of cerulean energy beams all fired from the dual laser rifles. Blue Dragon continued its onslaught as Adam directed. His adrenaline had taken over, and for a few moments he had forgotten about everything that was worrying his conscience.

“Lets skip the formalities shall we? I believe this has been an appropriate test run.” Rebel arrogantly mentioned.

“What? A test run? What the hell? Have you not been taking this match seriously you bastard?!” Adam screamed.

“Even though you are competent, appear to be incompetent. Though effective, appear to be ineffective.” Rebel calmly muttered.

Once again his deep proverbs confused Adam.

“Shut up!” Adam yelled. Blue Dragon abruptly swung both energy sabers that were recently equipped and ignited. With ease Shadow avoided the attack and with the blink of an eye kicked Blue

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Dragon back a few feet and then sped closer and slashed through Blue Dragon's left arm. Instantly the left arm dislodged from the torso sined and sparking. Being engulfed in the explosion Blue Dragon was tossed out of the cluster of caliginous smoke spiraling downwards.

"Please don't tell me that what you showed me earlier was it..."

Neo System....engaged... The feminine computer alerted.

Rebel smirked, now would be the moment of his dreams. Shadow dashed towards the descending injured Blue Dragon. The speed at which Shadow moved was undetectable by any FCS or radar leaving Adam blind against Rebel's attacks. Just as Adam's head rose and he began to regain Blue Dragon's stability Shadow's remaining leg fiercely kicked the torso of the blue MF. As Blue Dragon fell Adam's body was subjected to a strain he had not felt in a while. His body felt like it was being torn apart limb by limb; the anxiety and nerves that swelled up in his gut caused his conscience to begin to slip every few seconds. He began to think that he wouldn't be able to beat Rebel, not now that his opponent had admitted to not taking the beginning of the match seriously. Even if it was a bluff on Rebel's call, it wasn't something to take lightly.

Just as his vision began to blur and fade to black he saw Shadow advancing with its energy saber ignited in preparation to strike.

"Sharon...." He mumbled just before he fell unconscious in the heat of the battle.

Sharon quickly stumbled away from the guardrail where the rest of her friends were as she clutched her chest in pain. Her breathing became slightly erratic, she felt like something had just pierced her heart. She instantly knew that something was wrong, that Adam was struggling. Ashley and Heather instinctively turned around and without a second thought ran to her.

"Sharon! Are you alright!" Heather yelled. The sound of Heather's voice caused Stephen, Mario and Michelle to abruptly turn around as well.

"Oh my God is she alright? Stephen call the doctors to the hanger!" Mario screamed.

Sharon sighed taking a deep breath as she held out her hand waving to Stephen, signaling him to not call anyone.

"I'm fine....but Adam....he's in pain. He's suffering." Sharon quietly mentioned.

"What? How can you tell that?" Mario interrupted.

"I just know alright...." Sharon paused looking back out into space as Shadow continued to slash at Blue Dragon briefly. The strikes weren't full blown, only enough to graze and damage the armor.

As Sharon slowly walked back to the edge of the guard rail her eyes closed and her fingers intertwined with one another. She began to pray.

"Are you done already? Hmpf, oh well. I guess I asked too much of you....well then I guess then isn't much left to do other than to end this match." Rebel said disappointingly.

Just as Shadow began to approach Blue Dragon Adam's eyes shot open as if he heard Sharon's prayer. With his right hand he quickly typed a few letter combinations and engaged his EX mode.

Angel System....EX Mode engaged.

Just then the six remaining orbital wings abruptly launched from the seemingly defenseless Blue Dragon to Rebel's surprise. Just as the orbital wings began to fire the remaining thigh cannon pivoted upwards and fired as well. The massive beam of plasma energy burst onto Shadow's core sending it flying backwards. During its tumble it became bombarded by dozens of cerulean energy beams that caused the obsidian MF to dance violently in space while Blue Dragon burst out heading towards Shadow with newfound speed. Before Rebel could say a word Blue Dragon sped passed slashing the torso with the energy saber which left a deep gash on the core. The force of the strike sent the cockpit to rumble violently, Rebel's body was flung outwards into the LCD screen. His head jerked back violently as a form of whiplash, because of this he lost control of his MF for an instant. He began to rub the back of his neck in attempts to deal with the pain.

"Ugh....you...." Rebel muttered.

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Adam remained quiet as he stared at his target. Blue Dragon once again sped by Shadow but spun around on its side at the last second slicing through Shadow's right arm. The limb became singed from the attack and floated lifelessly through out the canvas of space.

Luscious smiled as he took a sip of his red wine.

"It looks like you are a failure after all Rebel...hmm, how amusing..."

Both Reine and Zach watched the match from Zach's room in the infirmary. They were amazed by how exciting a match it was.

"Do you think he'll do it? I mean do you think Adam will win?" Reine asked.

"Yeah...I can tell. Adam will win for sure." Zach replied.

"You're right...of course he'll win"

They both smiled and looked back at the television screen as the match continued.

Blue Dragon suddenly shot back towards Shadow as the six orbital wings continued to release energy rounds. Rebel began to laugh silently at first, but after a few seconds his laughter was loud enough to echo throughout all of space. Suddenly Shadow's boosters ignited and the black MF zoomed towards the orbital wings. Adam remained calm and dropped the energy saber in space and grabbed the other one. With the one energy saber in Blue Dragon's remaining hand the blue MF quickly forced it together with the one floating in space. As the two sabers connected Adam ignited both ends and instantly began to head towards Rebel who was making quick work of the orbital wings. With each second that passed one of the orbital wings exploded into pieces becoming nothing more than burnt pieces of metallic debris.

"What a rush...I must thank you for this match so far Adam. It has been so much more than what I had originally expected.

"Don't thank me yet. The match isn't over!" Adam yelled as Blue Dragon slashed but missed. Shadow dashed around the blue MF and managed to slash through the wing docking unit on the back. The unit blew up causing a fiery explosion to send Blue Dragon flying uncontrollably for a few seconds. In those seconds Shadow repeatedly appeared behind Adam and slashed at the back of the MF each time. With each attack more and more pieces of armor flung outwards singed and useless.

"Damn it...*cough*..." Adam's body was feeling the strain of the EX mode. He had only successfully used it twice before this match. One against Gabriel and the other against his brother, but his body still wasn't used to the strain for an elongated period of time. Just as Shadow prepared to strike one more time Blue Dragon flipped backwards causing the back of the left leg to collide with Shadow's core. Rebel was shocked by the attack and was left with no time to block. Shadow was then thrown backwards and Adam was given another chance to go on the offensive.

"That was a good move...but you will not defeat me. You're not worthy to defeat me! I am superior to you!" Rebel screamed. It was the first time he had ever shown any sign of intense emotion ever.

Adam was frozen in his seat, the sound of his voice in a harsh tone was familiar, but he was unable to pinpoint the origin.

"You think you're superior?! You're a great pilot...I'll attest to that, but you are not some kind of God...you're still human!" Adam screamed back.

Blue Dragon sped towards Shadow with the dual energy saber flaring and quickly slashed through the remaining leg unit. Just as it exploded Shadow swung its left arm downwards but Adam managed to force Blue Dragon to sway to the right. But the crimson beam of energy pierced the armor of the right leg causing it to explode instantly. Both MFs were thrown off in separate directions.

"I am not human! I am more than human! I am better than human!" Rebel began to rant what Adam thought was nonsense.

"What are you talking about? That's not possible! If you're not human than what else can you possibly be?" Adam screamed back.

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By this time both Shadow and Blue Dragon regained stability and headed towards each other.

“It doesn’t matter what is possible and what isn’t! The fact of the matter is that I am more than human! I understand what it means to be human! To be free of sin! You humans take everything for granted, the ability to feel, to live and all you do is sin against each and against your creator! You don’t deserve the right to live!”

“What the hell are you saying? This has nothing to do with anything!” Adam screamed. Both Blue Dragon and Shadow collided with one another, their energy sabers rubbing against each other as sparks of electricity and spurts of energy shot out uncontrollably. The two MFs remained engaged trying to out power the other.

“I am saying that this world is based on sin! And needs to be purged! I alone understand this!” Rebel screamed.

“What?!” Instantly dozens of confused thoughts shot through his mind, his pupils widened while his body became numb. He heard the same type of theme coming out from Gabriel’s mouth in their match but didn’t understand what he meant. But here, now he was starting to put things together as best he could. He still didn’t know much, but he was in too much shock to realize what was going on around him.

“Humanity had their time, and they’ve done nothing but sin, and destroy each other. They need to be tried and held accountable for their actions. That time is now!” Rebel screamed. Suddenly Shadow’s boosters exploded with power and Blue Dragon began to move backwards. The dual cerulean energy saber slowly started to arch inwards as Shadow’s saber moved forward.

“Humanity....humanity isn’t like that! Who are you to judge?! Who are you?!” Adam screamed.

“I am....I am no one!” Rebel screamed back violently.

Adam cringed as his dual energy saber exploded from the force of energy being exerted. The pieces of metallic debris flung outwards singed in all angles as Shadow’s left arm pushed its way down slicing through Blue Dragon’s right arm causing it to explode. The MF was tossed to the side missing both arms; the cockpit rocked violently causing Adam’s body to fling around in the restraints. His azure helmet smacked hard against the restraining bar inside the cockpit causing the visor to shatter. The plastic shards imbedded themselves into his cheek causing blood mixed with sweat to drip down his face. He quickly took his helmet off revealing his sweat drenched brown hair, the wet strands of hair slid over his eyes blocking some of his view. His vision slowly became stained crimson as trickles of blood flowed into his eyelids.

The Angel System suddenly disengaged as Blue Dragon floated in space while Shadow lingered over the severely damaged MF.

“It was a good match, but you are not strong enough to handle what lies ahead. You can not prevent the great tribulation from occurring. It is inevitable.” Rebel replied.

“Ugh....I’ll still try...” Adam mumbled as the remaining thigh cannon fired. Rebel smirked as Shadow easily moved out of the way and slashed through the cannon causing it to explode.

“It’s over....you lost.” Rebel replied.

“...bastard....what are you?”

“Heh...I don’t really know.” He replied.

The crowd watched in awe as the match came to an end with Rebel as the victor.

“Damn....” Mario mumbled under his breath.

“He tried his best....and really gave him a good run.” Heather replied.

“Yeah...but there’s something else.” Sharon interrupted.

As Shadow returned to Prosperity Adam could do nothing but stare at the rotating Earth, he was no longer filled with anxiety and just because he lost didn’t mean he was done fighting.

“I know what I’m fighting for now....I will not let him succeed....”

Chapter Thirty-Three: Genetic Defect

Rebel358 had won the Azure Cup as expected. However what no one expected was that he would have a difficult time doing so in the final match against Adam Novus. The match that was put on was a spectacle of amazing feats one after another. Rebel stood tall and glorious in front of the hundreds of pilots and spectators in the dome. The ceremony was preparing to begin; Adam remained in the corner of the dome with bandages wrapped around his forehead, left arm and rib cage. His body sustained a good

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amount of internal and external injuries from the intensity of the battle, namely the duration of the Angel System's EX mode. His torso leaned onto the wall as he stared at Rebel who glared back.

"Something the matter?" Mario asked. Adam turned his head to his left to see Mario staring back at him.

"It's nothing, don't worry about it."

"Right.. you've been quiet ever since you got back from the match. Does it really bother you that much that you lost?"

"Not really...but Rebel...I'm not sure what to say about him."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I mean, during the match he was saying things, things about humanity and how we're all sinners and need to be purged."

"What?" The shock of the statement caused Mario to move off the wall, his arms waving out in the air. It wasn't the kind of statement that people hear everyday.

"Yeah...that's what I said. I'm not sure to take it literally or what? Either way, I'm going to try and keep tabs on him you know."

"Yeah...but now that the tournament is done we're going to be leaving Prosperity and fall back into that chaotic world below us. Just how in the hell do you plan on keeping tabs on the guy?"

"I'm pretty confident that it won't be that difficult to do. I mean, if he is unstable which I personally think he is then I'm sure he's going to be doing something drastic." Adam replied.

"I see, you tell Stephen about this yet?"

"Yeah...he said the same thing. We're going to need to watch Rebel. The world is already in a state of confusion with the nuclear attack on Berlin. If Rebel gets thrown into the mix than only God knows what might just happen..."

"Yeah..." Mario mumbled as the ceremony continued.

Luscious smirked as he handed the golden trophy to Rebel. Rebel reluctantly smiled back at Luscious while taking the foot sized trophy into his hands. Everyone went wild as Rebel stood before them, their champion.

"This is boring; I'm going to check on Blue Dragon. I want to see how the mechanics are coming along with the repairs." Adam mumbled.

"You sure?"

"Yeah, I don't want to watch this." Adam replied as he left the dome, Mario sigh shrugging his shoulders and soon followed suit.

"So you're all packed and ready to head back to Earth then?" Ashley asked as she sat on the wooden dresser watching Sharon stuff her clothes into her suitcase. Sharon sighed as she began to pull the zipper around the edges of the obsidian case.

"Yeah, I've been up here far too long. I want to see New York and solid ground again." Sharon replied.

"I see...so what are you planning on doing? I mean we're all going back to the military after a couple days rest. I've already received information on a mission that Stephen's team is assigned too."

"Really? That was fast....*sigh*, I guess it's to be expected after what happened. Has the EAP responded yet?" Sharon asked while she began to pound the suitcase so it would fit all of the clothes she had folded.

"Not yet...most believe that they're assembling their forces on Mars and are preparing to strike any TA location at any moment. Vincent Avidus is ordering an assault on Paris and Japan, the EAP's other two central locations. He wants to end the war as quickly as possible."

"I see....but can anything good come from this? I mean he's sacrificing innocent lives for his own gain."

"You're right, but in Vincent's eyes everyone living in EAP territory is filth and need to be either killed or conquered." Ashley sighed; she hated thinking about the monster that she worked for.

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“Why don’t you just leave? I can tell you dislike working for the TA.”

“I can’t...it’s a job, regardless of how I feel I am a military personnel and I have to carry out my assignments regardless of my personal feelings....”

“You’re a stronger person than I am. I could never work for some one like Vincent Avidus or the military.”

Ashley smiled brushing back a few loose strands of her dirty blonde hair.

“Nah...you’re a much stronger person than I am. You prefer to live by your own morals and convictions. I can’t stand on my own...I’ve been that way my whole life. Kinda hard to change now you know?”

Sharon smiled back at Ashley. “Nah, I’m only as strong as the friends around me.”

“Heh, listen we still have time let’s try and grab some lunch.” Ashley replied as she jumped off the dresser. Sharon nodded.

The office was apathetic and dismal, Luscious sat at the forefront of the office sitting with a folder neatly placed on his desk. Light slowly crept through the cracks as the door opened. Luscious smirked devilishly as Rebel entered the lush carpeted floor. His shoes softly landing on the ground with each step as his ominous figure began to approach Luscious.

“Shut the door behind you. I’m sure you won’t mind the shadows. After all, that is what you are.” Luscious wasted no time in speaking.

“A shadow? Heh, I guess that is one way of putting it. I work well in the shadows Luscious. But I refuse to hide beneath them like you. Why are you wasting time? We believe in the same thing! We both know what needs to be done! Why aren’t you doing anything?!” Rebel’s voice began to increase with each step he took towards Luscious.

“You’re too impulsive, if you try and do this now you’ll only fail. The clones are being transported to Utopia as we speak, once there they will continue their programming and training in order to prepare them for the war that is ahead.” Luscious replied calmly. His eyes glanced at his bottle of wine, he was dependant on it; he had been for as long as he could remember. His body seemed like it couldn’t properly sustain itself without the liquid in the Merlot bottle.

“You’re wrong...you’re just too weak and afraid to go through with it. You’re a procrastinator Luscious, you don’t have what it takes to rule over Utopia and the true paradise created for humanity. You’re nothing more than human, filled with the same sin that plagues everyone else.”

“Heheh, that’s an interesting perspective coming from a soulless failure.” Luscious replied.

“Failure? You’re the failure; your failure to act proves this.”

Luscious smirked trying not to burst out into a fit of laughter. He slowly leaned forward picking up the manila folder that was placed in front of him. He slowly glanced back towards Rebel and grinned.

“You think I’m the failure...you have no clue what you are? Or how you even came into existence do you?”

Rebel began to stumble backwards as he was appalled by the question. It was true however; he didn’t know the origin of his birth. All he knew was that he was given the label Rebel358. He always had the sense that he was something beyond the scopes of humanity, hence why he was able to pilot the MF Shadow the way he did.

“What are you talking about?”

“Everyone has a birth, an event that brings them into existence. And you don’t even know what yours was...heh, you don’t even know the past and you’re trying to work on fixing the future. You can’t even live in the present you are so screwed up. And you have the audacity to call me a failure. Here, its time you knew just exactly who you are.” Luscious replied as he dropped the folder on the floor. Rebel’s eyebrows twitched, his crimson eyes trying to pierce Luscious as a form of intimidation but it wasn’t working. Luscious leaned against the edge of his desk smirking at the confused Rebel. Reluctantly Rebel bent down to pick up the folder.

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“Yeah, I thought so. I’ll leave you alone, you’re going to need some time to work things out...oh, and before I forget I am fully aware that you stole 4 prototype MFs from the hanger. Are they going to be part of your tribulation for humanity?” Luscious mumbled sarcastically.

“Pfft, it’s not like you’re using them?”

“I’m not. But just remember that they are extremely experimental, I hope the four pilots you got for them can handle the stress that is exerted.” Luscious replied as he left the door. The door slammed shut with a thunderous sound leaving Rebel in the shadows once again holding onto the manila folder that contained his past in fewer than 20 pages.

“...Project Cryostatis.....” His crimson eyes scanned through the chaotic text paying no attention to the various illustrations of charts and graphs. “...357 failures....what the hell.....”

“Hey be careful with that!” Adam screamed as he watched the mechanics lingering inside Blue Dragon’s cockpit so they could reconnect the OS and make sure everything was working properly.

The damage that Adam’s MF sustained during the match with Rebel was severe, the OS was burnt and needed to be replaced, and the wings were thrashed and needed to be rebuilt from the spare parts in Genesis. Luckily Genesis had technology similar to the ones used on Blue Dragon only more advanced. Optical wiring needed to be replaced; the boosters and ion thrusters too were in need of replacement. The H-Cell batteries were completely drained and no longer useful, new H-Cells needed to be installed. Adam sighed as he leaned over the guard rail; his eyes began to wander taking notice of 4 MFs he had never seen before until today.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Amy’s voice penetrated his ears. The sound at first caused his nerves to loosen, but he soon remembered that this person wasn’t truly Amy, but a clone of which Amy Caecus used to be.

“I’m broke; can you squeeze it to a dime?” Adam replied sarcastically.

Amy chuckled, her mahogany hair slowly oscillating through the chilled air conditioning wind. Adam began to laugh as well, it wasn’t often that he laughed, but for every rare occasion that it happened he found himself in bliss like state.

“What’s the matter? You did a great job out there.” Amy said as she firmly latched onto his right arm. Her chest budding forward rubbing against the muscle of his arms. He had to force himself to remember that she wasn’t Amy, not the real one.

“Just some things...today would have been my friend, Jen Fama’s birthday. Heh, I almost forgot.” Adam mumbled. His head turned to the side glancing back at Amy. It was hard for him not to find himself indulging in the feelings he once had for Amy Caecus before she died and before he met Sharon.

“Oh...I...I don’t remember her.”

“You wouldn’t.” Adam replied.

“*sigh* Listen...I know I’m not the real thing. I’ve accepted the fact that I’m merely a shadow of her lingering memory. But, I don’t know what else I’m supposed to do. I think that’s why I came here looking for you.” Amy mumbled.

“Well, you need to understand that I can’t decide your fate for you. That’s something you need to figure out on your own. I’m confident that you’ll figure something out.”

“No...no, I don’t think I will...” Her arm moved away from Adam’s and she began to walk away leaning over the guard rail. “Why would some one make me?”

Adam’s eyes widened, it was the most innocent thing he ever hear coming out of her mouth. He wasn’t sure how to answer the question.

“I’m guessing because someone couldn’t stand living without Amy Caecus....”

“I see....what about you? Could you stand living without Amy?”

“I...ummm...” Adam began stumbling his words in confusion. Sweat slowly ran down his face as the heat seemingly increased, or at least in his perspective. “...I miss Amy, that’s for sure. There are times when I feel like I could have done harder to save her....”

“And because of this regret you tend to stay away from me...I guess I understand.” Amy replied.

“I...that might be why. I’m sorry.”

“It’s ok...I think I would do the same if I was in your situation.”

“Heh...thanks.” Adam replied.

“Have you guys seen Rebel?” Pestilence asked moving his green hair away from his face. Both War and Famine shrugged their shoulders. Rebel had yet to return from his meeting with Luscious. Death smirked as he watched the door to the room slowly open. Rebel stumbled in with a crumbled piece of paper firmly clutched in his hand. His dark black and crimson hair lingering over his dilated pupils.

“Rebel! Are you alright? Where have you been?” War screamed loudly.

“It doesn’t matter...there’s no time. Suit up; we’re heading to Earth tonight. Humanity’s requiem will be played eloquently in the coming hours.”

Chapter Thirty-Four: Hour of Fate

“This is how it’s going to work. The drop pods will separate once we near the atmosphere, Pestilence you will be heading to Tokyo. That is the location of the EAP’s 2nd HQ. Destroy it. War, you will be heading towards Paris, the final EAP HQ. Famine your pod will be sending you to London, take out the TA base as quickly as possible. And Death you will be sent to Ontario for the other TA HQ. I will take care of the central HQ in Washington. If this all goes well then we’ll be able to finish this with little problems.” Rebel’s voice echoed discretely through the communications link to the other 4 MFs in the hanger.

Pestilence’s MF was ivory in color, and donned the name White Horse. It was a sleek middle weight biped design with two elongated spikes protruding from the shoulders outwards at a 45 degree angle. A massive brown cloth covered the back of the torso, it was made of special and unique fibers that would harden under extreme heat and act like a shield blocking any type of energy or plasma round. Hidden beneath the cloth was an Excalibur sword, a massive metallic sword with a thin beam of energy that radiates around the blade. White Horse also came equipped with dual grenade launchers which were held firmly in its hands, just above the wrists were two metallic blades that would extend outwards when needed.

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Famine's MF, Pale Horse was heavily armored with square-like limbs and a rectangular torso. The MF was a moving tower; the MF was equipped with a massive metallic axe that clung to the right side on the back of the torso next to a thin chrome energy cannon. The right arm was painted a different color than the rest of the gray tinted MF; it was crimson representing the heavy fire power stored in the right arm, a high attack powered bazooka. A thickly armored plated solid shield was attached to the left arm.

War's MF, Reaper Horse was a thinly armored bipedal unit, but what it lacked in armor it made up in speed with four extra boosters attached to the back of the torso. The purple and black MF held a dual sided energy trident in the right hand and a heavy bazooka on the left with two thigh cannons that fired linear solid shells. Its head unit was the most noticeable feature with four spikes pointing out from the top.

And finally Death's MF, Black Horse was a heavily armored moving tank. When flying in space or in the atmosphere of Earth or Mars its leg units retracted inwards like a standard hover unit. But once the behemoth MF touched the ground its legs pivoted outwards taking the form of massive tank treads, powerful enough to move over any terrain. In its arm Black Horse had two massive plasma cannons, the head unit rested in between two elongated grenade cannons. The MF focused on sheer destructive power, such a power that could invoke death at any moment.

Rebel smirked as he noticed his four horsemen were prepared to head down to Earth to start what he referred to as the Tribulation of Humanity.

"Now, I expect to run into some resistance but do not let it detract you from the mission at hand. You are to destroy the main bases for both the TA and the EAP. Once they are crippled we shall finish them off with the EAP satellite cannon coded named, Retribution. I have recently managed to hack into its system; the remote detonator for the cannon is beside me here in Shadow's cockpit. Are there any questions?"

"Yeah, I thought we were going to wait. You said they would have killed themselves by now." Famine muttered.

"I was hoping for that outcome. I was expecting the nuclear attack on Berlin to trigger a nuclear war. But the EAP is much smarter than I thought, they must have known that if they launched nuclear weapons at the TA that there was a possibility of nuclear winter to occur. That was what I was expecting, and now we have to get our hands dirty." Rebel replied.

"Rebel...are you sure you're ok for this? Ever since the end of the tournament you've been acting well...strange..." War interrupted.

"I'm fine...I'm not sure I've ever seen things as clearly as I do now." Rebel replied.

The 5 descent pods slowly opened, each pod was about 30 meters in height and 15 meters in width giving each MF more than enough room to be hidden within. Each MF slowly moved into their respected pods as the count down to the release began. Luscious smirked as he watched looming over in the control room for the descent hanger. His hand began to swirl the glass of Merlot in his hand.

"And so it begins....I wonder what will happen...."

The world was still lingering in a state of confined chaos looming in the wake from the nuclear attack on Berlin. Riots broke out all over the U.S. and Canada, people all outraged from what they felt was an evil attack. The EAP had lost a substantial amount of intelligence from the eradication of their central hub. Thousands of families were lost in the catastrophic event, soldiers that were stationed on Mars demanded justice which led to unsanctioned battles on Mars. Due to the majority of the TA's forces now stationed on Earth the Mars soldiers never stood a chance. It was a massacre, thousands of TA soldiers covered in a sea of their own blood; Evo was demolished in an instant from advancing EAP soldiers. Also the TA's other 3 main camps; Stratos and Zion were also left in shambles covered by nothing but a sea of burning flames. The EAP became a dominant force on Mars with only a few TA soldiers still living, the ones that did live either became POWs or managed to join together creating a

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rebel faction trying to survive. The news cast of all of this information sounded off on every television set on Earth as well as Prosperity.

Adam sighed as he reclined on his mattress with his legs stretched out to their capacity the right crossed over the left. Sharon's eyes were sealed tightly as her head reclined resting on Adam's shoulders, her right arm crossed over her chest with her hand softly placed on his torso. She was wearing a pink halter top and jeans; he was wearing an azure shirt and denims as well. They still had a pass for up to another week to remain on Prosperity but Adam planned on heading back to Earth once Blue Dragon's repairs were completed. His eyes were on the borderline of closing, the day was dreadfully boring, ever since the tournament came to its end a few days prior Prosperity became nothing more than a hotel in space.

"Will it ever end...?" Adam mumbled as his thoughts trailed off from the subject matter of war that was being televised.

Suddenly his phone began to ring rhythmically. He reluctantly glanced over to the small silver object, the sound of the phone also caused Sharon to wake from her slumber. Her eyes flickered open and her lips parted as she yawned.

"Hello." Adam answered as he flipped the phone open.

"Hey, listen, something's happened...." Stephen, it was always soothing to Adam's soul when he heard his brother say those lines. It was impossible to count how many times Stephen had said that to him over the past 2 years.

"What? Is it important? I was trying to just enjoy the rest of my time up here before we went back to Earth."

"Yeah, well looks like we might have to head back a lot earlier than originally expected." Stephen replied.

"Huh? What happened?"

"Get your ass over to my room now. Mario and everyone else is already here. I'll explain everything to you once you get here. Later." Stephen abruptly hung up the phone leaving Adam in the dark.

"Is everything alright?" Sharon asked even though she knew the answer. Her gleaming face and wide brown eyes looked back at Adam innocently.

"Why do you even ask those questions anymore?" Adam asked smirking back at her while reluctantly getting off the mattress.

"I don't know...I guess it's just a habit. So what's going on?"

"Hell if I know. Everyone is at Stephen's room. He said he'd inform me once I got there."

"I see...you think it's anything serious?"

"Knowing my luck; probably. Come on, I'd really like to get back to relaxing." Adam replied.

General Copiare remained in London along with hundreds of soldiers for the TA. They had been stationed there since the bombing of Berlin. The General rested in the control tower waiting for further orders for Vincent Avidus. Vincent Avidus, the bane of humanity as he had been named as of late.

"Sir...radar is detecting an object....it's coming in extremely fast and just passed through the atmosphere. ETA in 5 minutes..."

"What? What could possibly be heading in our direction at that kind of velocity?" General Copiare screamed as he sprinted towards the radar systems in the tower. A blinking ivory dot continued to grow in size with each second that passed.

"Can we get a visual?" Copiare screamed.

The frantic young TA soldier shook his head, it was his first day on the job and probably last.

"General we're getting a radio message from Ontario and Washington....the same thing is happening there....our satellite has detected 5 objects in total sir..." A communications soldier blurted.

"What the hell is going on? What has our commander and chief said about this?"

"Nothing yet sir..."

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“Fine, launch all Shade units to intercept the object. It could be an EAP assault and if that’s the case then we need to stop them as soon as possible!” General Copiare screamed.

“But sir...we still...”

“I don’t care. LAUNCH THOSE SHADES!”

“Yes...yes sir...Attention all TA pilots, we are at a level 5 alert, scramble to your Shades, I repeat scramble to your Shades and launch!”

Within seconds every Shade pilot began to sprint towards the base’ hanger, no one knew what was going on; it wasn’t their job to know, just to pull the trigger. 30 Shades in all lingered in the dreary hanger with dozens of thick obsidian wires protruding out from each machine.

Confusion swept across the planet as the five objects continued to descend. As they entered the safety of the cool air each descent pod abruptly burst open revealing the 5 MFs, Shadow, White Horse, Pale Horse, Reaper Horse, and Black Horse. Rebel smirked while opening a communications link with his 4 horsemen.

“Alright...that was the easy part. Now I’m sure each military facility has picked up or signal so it is extremely important to carry this out in a quick manor...and most important of all, have fun...hehehe...” Rebel’s voice carried on over the globe reaching each of his MFs.

“Yes sir...” Each pilot responded simultaneously.

Famine and his Pale Horse began to ignite the thrusters slowing down its descent. Abruptly his radar began to beep rapidly signifying that there was a tremendous force already approaching his location. Famine smiled as he pushed aside his white hair, his pure glowing blue eyes began to thin focusing on the torrent of Shades that was rapidly approaching.

“Heh...It’s been awhile. SHOW ME WHAT YOU GOT!” He screamed. Pale Horse’s boosters erupted with orange flames as the gray MF zoomed towards the bulk of Shades.

Death smiled as he took notice of the TA HQ located in Ontario. His eyes slowly began to quiver with excitement and anticipation, his fingers constantly rubbing the side of the throttles as if he was at the peak of physiological pleasure. 30 Shades began to launch from the base all heading directly for his descending MF. Dark Horse’s dual plasma cannons slowly extended forwards while his eyes followed the lock on boxes that began to appear on the display screen.

“Hehehehe...hahahaha, YOU WILL ALL DIE! NO ONE WILL SAVE YOU!”

Tokyo too began to burst into Chaos. The EAP base stationed in the center of the highly populated city continued to track the 5 rapidly descending objects. General Fenrir stood at the edge of the control panel in the radar tower.

“<What the hell are those things? Are they Trinity Alliance MFs?!?!>” Fenrir screamed.

The young radar military soldier quickly turned around in his chair. He couldn’t tell exactly what was heading towards Tokyo at such a speed.

“<We can’t tell General...not at this current distance...>”

“<Damn...how many Night-Wings do we have stationed here?>”

“<One second General....10...>”

“<10? That won’t be enough...those damn TA when will they stop. First Berlin and now Tokyo...DAMN THEM...Prepare Blitzangriff.>” Fenrir screamed.

“<You’re going out there?>”

“<Yes...10 Night-Wings might not be enough!>”

Pestilence’s green flowing strands of hair covered his eyes while he continued to thrust Pale Horse into stability. He sighed as he was sitting calm and collected eagerly awaiting the arrival of the EAP’s soldiers. His fingers were itching for the battle to move underway, he was tired of watching other pilots engage in battle he wanted his turn.

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“It’s about time....” His voice trailed as the 10 Night-Wings flew into the sky lead by Blitzangriff. The reverse jointed MF with a triangular looking core. The purple icon of the Japanese military held onto a linear AST rifle in the right hand and a hi-end machine gun in its left. A massive energy trident hung off the back of the core; it had been a good amount of time since Fenrir was seen on the battlefield.

“There we go....11 in all huh...YOUR END IS NEAR!”

Paris had the same reaction as Tokyo; the soldiers broke out into panic all believing the descending object to be another attack mirroring the one on Berlin earlier. The General stationed at Paris just stared at the radar screen in awe while he blindly sent out a Night-Wing battalion of 15 units.

“<General Dupree....do you think it’s another TA attack?>” The communications soldier question with fear clearly written on his face.

“<I’m not sure....but we must engage the unknown object just in case. Any word from Tokyo?>”

“<None sir...>”

“<Damn...>”

Reaper Horse eloquently began to descend through the air as the four extra boosters began to flicker crimson beams of thrust. War made no sound, his eyes focused coldly on his mission at hand; his brooding silhouette loomed in the cockpit. The muscles on his arms stretching through his jumpsuit, the tension was unbearable for him, they ordered a suit 1 size too small. Suddenly the cloth making up the brown jumpsuit began to tear, with only that sound screeching through out the walls of the cockpit.

“Ah...that’s much better.” War mumbled as his jumpsuit’s sleeve ripped off from the size of his brooding muscles.” His radar then began to pick up the Night-Wings that Paris’ branch of the EAP had sent out.

“There you are.....WILL YOU BE A CHALLENGE?!”

“Vincent....there’s an unknown object approaching Washington quickly!” The feminine communications soldier screamed.

Vincent cringed as he sat comfortably in his leather bound chair at the end of his office in Revelations.

“Is it the EAP? Are they finally attacking us for payback for Berlin?”

“I don’t think it’s the EAP Vincent....there’s 4 other objects descending through the atmosphere all heading towards focal military bases in London, Ontario, Paris and Tokyo...”

“What? That means someone’s launching an attack on both the TA and the EAP? Who the hell would be dumb enough to do that?!” Vincent demanded to now.

“Not sure sir....what should we do?”

“Send out every available Shade and intercept that object!”

“Yes sir!”

Rebel sat reclining in his chair holding up his copy of *Art of War* in his hands. His eyebrows arched as his radar began to boom.

“About time...” Rebel muttered as he slid his hands over to the control throttles on the side of his seat. He pushed his obsidian hair away from his eyes as he smirked.

“Hey....wait a minute....isn’t that Shadow, the MF of Rebel358; the winner of the Azure Cup?!” One Shade pilot yelled out as he continued to ascend with the rest of his fleet.

“...Oh my God.....you’re right....that is Shadow!”

“But what is he doing here?!”

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“Are you ready....THIS IS YOUR TRIBULATION HUMANITY! Hahahahaha” Rebel’s eyes were enflamed with intensity and hatred. All seemed lost as Shadow began to engage the Shade pilots.

Vincent Avidus jumped out of his seat as the communications operator did the same.

“What is it?!”

“Sir...there’s another object approaching from the East...it’s heat signatures match the unknown MF that we were pursuing a few days ago...”

Vincent’s eyes widened, it was the MF that managed to destroy 30 Shades in a single encounter. For the first time in his life he began to feel and express an adamant sensation of fear.

“So Rebel and four other pilots left towards Earth...” Adam mumbled as he glanced up at his brother. Stephen sat on a plastic chair with his torso leaning over the back of the chair. Mario was laying down on one of the mattresses with Michelle. Ashley, Heather and Sharon sat comfortably on the other mattress while Zach and Reine sat on the edge of the window in Stephen’s quarters.

“Yeah...that’s what it seems like.” Stephen replied.

“Damn...we need to get to Earth.” Adam replied.

“Huh? Why? What’s going on?” Ashley interrupted.

“Rebel...he said something to me during our match about humanity needing to be purged...I don’t know what he meant by it but I’m sure it has something to do with him leaving to Earth.” Adam replied.

Suddenly their attention was diverted to the television as breaking announcements began to flicker on the screen.

“This is Stephanie Star and what you are about to see is live footage from Washington, Ontario, London, Paris and Tokyo. All of which are under heavy attack from 4 unknown MFs and strangely the MF belonging to the champion of the Azure Cup, Rebel358. We will feed you information once we receive until then all we can say is that the world has broken into chaos.” As her voice trailed off the screen split up into 5 squares, each depicting images from one of the 5 locations. Adam along with everyone else stared as all sorts of emotions flooded into their minds and souls. Blinding flashes of explosions lit up the pure azure backdrop of a sky as Shades and Night-Wings fell singed nearly destroyed.

“DAMN IT!” Adam screamed as he punched the wall with his right hand. Sharon and Stephen looked up glancing at him.

“Adam...there’s nothing we could have done....” Heather began to say.

“No...I won’t accept that. I’m going.” Adam replied as he jumped off the dresser and headed for the door.

“And what do you intend to do? Blue Dragon hasn’t been completely repaired yet!” Stephen yelled.

“All that’s left is the OS and the Angel System; I can handle the repairs on that. Once I’m finished I’m heading to Earth to stop Rebel.”

“You foolish bastard.” Ashley mumbled.

“Heh...I guess I’m foolish. Call me whatever you wish, but I refuse to stand idly by while Rebel does this.”

“Adam wait...” Stephen said.

“What?”

“I’m coming.”

“Heh, if he’s going then so am I.” Mario replied.

“Ugh, fine, I’ll go. Someone has to look out for you three.” Heather mentioned.

“Count me in too.” Zach replied

“Yeah, I’m going.” Reine jumped in as well.

“I...” Before Michelle could finish Mario just shook his head. “You stay here. We’ll handle this.” Mario mentioned.

“Fine...but be careful.” Michelle muttered.

“You know I will.” Mario replied.

“Same goes for you Adam.” Sharon mumbled.

“You too Stephen.” Ashley said as well.

Both Adam and Stephen smirked and nodded.

“Well then, looks like we’re going back to Earth...we’ll stop this tribulation.”

Chapter Thirty-Five: Tribulation of Humanity

The skies burned from the chaos that engulfed the world. Tokyo, Paris, London, Ontario and Washington were all places of raging battles that baffled the world. Tokyo was already destroyed by Pestilence; it wasn’t much of a battle with only 10 Night-Wings and one commanding MF. All that was left was Blitzangriff and Fenrir was having a difficult time holding his own.

“Who the hell are you?!” Fenrir screamed in English. Blitzangriff’s right arm swung downwards with the energy trident but White Horse narrowly avoided the searing energy weapon. As Blitzangriff lunged forward White Horse equipped the Excalibur and with both metallic hands swung the massive elongated weapon. Fenrir’s eyes widened as the blade tore through the lower half of his MF. Flames raged, rupturing the armor of his MF. The boosters began to slowly power down and within seconds Blitzangriff began to spiral down towards the Pacific Ocean. He began to struggle with the throttles praying that some miracle would occur saving his life and his city.

“It’s no use. Your time is up. All of humanity’s time is up!” Pestilence screamed.

“What? What the hell are you saying?!” Fenrir’s eyes widened as White Horse swung the massive glistening sword. There was a brief moment of silence followed by a raging thunderous explosion that engulfed the remaining torso of Blitzangriff. The flames began to oscillate towards the ocean as burned pieces of debris pounded into the violent waves of water. Pestilence began to burst into a fit of laughter as he hovered over the sea of flames that overran Tokyo.

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“That’s one down...hehehehehahaha!!!!” His devilish laughter echoed in the skies as thousands of people ran in fear of their lives.

Rebel glared at the Shades that continued to fall like insects buzzing to a lamp. Shadow floated with little effort over the inferior MFs.

“Is this all you have to offer me? Hahaha, you’re making this much too easy!” Rebel exclaimed. Shadow zoomed down towards the main Revelations’ tower but was cut off by 6 green colored beams that fired into the sky from 3 more Shades.

“Oh good, I was hoping that this wasn’t the end!” Rebel screamed.

“Rebel...this is Pestilence, Tokyo has been dealt with....”

Rebel’s eyes peaked with satisfaction

“Good, stay there and make sure to clean up what ever little insects managed to survive.” Rebel replied.

“Understood.”

“Rebel, this is Famine, London has been subdued.”

“Excellent Famine, things are progressing a lot quicker than I had planned....hold on....there’s something else here...” Rebel quickly turned his head around to notice a flashing ray of crimson energy in the distance flying over the Atlantic. Streams of water flushed outwards erupting into the sky from the thrust of the MF. Rebel smirked as he vaguely recognized the demonic looking figure.

“Haha...this is an unexpected pleasure I have to say. The clone of Nicholas Novus managed to escape from Genesis and found his way to the Chimera...hahaha...what a turn of events. Maybe I’ll be able to enjoy myself!” Rebel screamed.

Chimera flew over the water approaching Shadow who was not too far away.

Will you provide me with an adequate challenge?

“Will you provide me with an adequate challenge?” Nick’s dual layered voice echoed. Even though he was an artificially created copy of the original Nick he was still bound by the chip imbedded in the back of his neck. Chimera’s six angular wings spread out as Shadow sped towards.

“Nicholas Novus...haha, isn’t this a laugh. The clone has managed to follow in the original’s footsteps!” Rebel screamed.

The obsidian left arm swung just as Chimera swayed to the left avoiding the attack. In the midst of the lunge the six wings fired simultaneously. Rebel shrugged his shoulders as Shadow managed to escape harm once again.

Who are you and how do you know me?!

“Who are you and how do you know me?!” Nick screamed with his anger raising.

“My name doesn’t matter...I am a product of sin just like you! But I have a purpose, I have a destiny. You, you’re nothing more than a soulless creature bound to a computer chip and cause nothing but pointless destruction!” Rebel screamed.

Who are you to judge me?!

“Who are you to judge me?!”

“I am the bringer of death and redemption to this world!”

Both Shadow and Chimera continued to exchange blows briefly. Vincent Avidus paced around his office while the two demonic MFs continued to engage one another miles away.

“Get in touch with Ontario, London someone!” Vincent screamed.

The young communications officer turned around expression a face of depression and fear. Her radiant red hair was tied in a pony tail and flapped in the air with each trivial motion that she made.

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“It’s no good sir; both Ontario and London appear to be offline....what does this mean?”

“I don’t know....honest to God I have no idea what is happening....” Vincent mumbled softly. His knees began to buckle causing his weight to drop to the ground. For the first time ever in his life he was clueless and completely stricken with fear. His silver hair which was usually booming with vibrancy was now dull and dismal.

A bright crimson explosion shook the foundation of Washington as tidal waves raised high into the air only to crash down on the shore of Maryland. The intensity of the battle between Shadow and Chimera raged onwards over the Atlantic with no sign of halt.

“I will not lose to a creation lower than any human plaguing this planet!” Rebel screamed.

Shadow’s energy saber burned towards Chimera but was deflected by the energy lance. Shadow spun away from Chimera while Chimera burst in an attacking lunge. The crimson MF began to unleash torrents of crimson energy beams all of which were deflected back by quick swordplay by Rebel and Shadow.

“You can not defeat me. You’re nothing more than a second rate human in a second rate MF!” Rebel shouted.

It may be true that I am nothing more than an image of a person who once walked this Earth....but I am not about to be shut down by a mere human who dwells in delusions of grandeur.

“It may be true that I am nothing more than an image of a person who once walked this Earth....but I am not about to be shut down by a mere human who dwells in delusions of grandeur.”

Chimera’s energy lance suddenly swept through a small patch of ground below, the searing beam of positron energy scotched the earth. As the beam flung up from out of the dirt ridden ground it flung past the side of Shadow narrowly grazing the charcoal armor. Rebel instantly began to laugh at the close encounter.

“As amusing as this unexpected encounter with you is Nick....errr, no that’s not right. You’re a clone of him, you don’t have a name; you don’t deserve an identity.”

I can live without one...

“I can live without one...”

“That’s where you’re wrong...you won’t live through this tribulation.” Rebel replied calmly. Just as Chimera began to turn around Shadow fired off dozens of plasma rounds all of which collided with Chimera’s core exploding in a massive display of fireworks. The caliginous clouds of distilled smoke floated in the sky as Chimera burned falling into the small patch of ground beneath.

“....where the hell is he? He should have been here by now....damn looks like I’m going to have to keep fooling around then...hehehehe....”

Blue Dragon, Alpha, Anima, Blue Angel, Hades and Sigma all prepared for their drop into space. Adam glared out of his cockpit still mentally preparing for the seemingly impossible task ahead of him. He was filled with doubts surrounding this up coming confrontation with Rebel; the man who beat him twice.

“You ready?” Stephen’s voice smoothly flowed through the communications link as his face appeared on the right hand display screen.

“Yeah, I’m fine...”

“No you’re not. Why do you lie, you should have realized that you can’t lie for the life of you.”

“Ugh...is it that obvious?”

“Of course. You don’t think we can stop this do you?”

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"I'm having my doubts that's true. I mean, I lost to Rebel twice now. How can I expect to beat him this time around?"

"Well this time, we fight as a team. We'll beat him together."

"Yeah..." Adam mumbled. The left display screen abruptly turned on and to Adam's surprised Luscious' face greeted him.

"It's been a while Adam Novus..." Luscious muttered.

"Luscious...what do you want?"

"Is it so much to offer my assistance?"

"You're asking to help? I apologize if I find that a little hard to believe. And forgive me, but I don't have any time to play your games. I know about the clones Luscious, which Genesis has been hiding from the public. I know that you're working with Rebel." Adam replied.

Luscious grinned. "The clones...yes I am aware of that atrocity. You see Caleb and Severen's parents were the ones who started the program, and they left me with one big mess to clean up. And you're preparing to clean up another mess, so I would feel much better if I assisted."

"Heh...that's a touching story. But I'm fine handling this on my own."

"I see, well then at least allow me to tell you where Rebel is..."

"He's at Washington D.C., we know already. We've got it covered. Thanks, now if you'll excuse us..." Adam flipped the communications switch off.

"That was interesting..." Stephen mumbled.

"Yeah, but he doesn't matter. We'll deal with Luscious and Genesis once we finish with Rebel. So the plan remains as discussed?" Adam questioned.

"Yeah, Heather will head to London, Reine will head to Ontario, Zach to Paris, and Mario to Tokyo while you and me will head straight for D.C. and deal with Rebel. Hopefully the two of us combined will be able to topple him."

"Hopefully?"

"Yeah, can't be definite."

"I see...well then, let's crash this party shall we?" Adam asked.

Stephen nodded, Mario nodded, Heather winked her eyes, and both Zach and Reine saluted.

The doors to the hanger slowly began to slide open; each drop pod suddenly dislodged from the clamps and were sent into the void of space. As each pod launched small thrusters began to ignite in order to get each pod into position so that they would not miss their window of opportunity.

Famine laughed at the petty attempt to make a defense. Pale Horse floated over the fallen crumbled buildings that covered the cracked streets of London. Women and children like screams perpetually bounced off the remaining walls staining the serene sky above. The orange flames were still flickering keeping the gray MF in the air.

"Where the hell is the back up from D.C.?!?" General Copiare screamed. His eyes were glazed over from the lack of sleep he had been getting as of late.

"General it's no use; we're not receiving any signals from Ontario, or D.C....for all we know they could be destroyed!" The Ensign soldier screamed.

"Damn it! We can't just give up and hand London over to this bastard!" Copiare continued to scream forcing his body to the verge of a heart attack. His veins were pulsating becoming visible through his pale toned skin.

"Sir...we've got something on radar...it's another object coming in extremely fast!"

"What? More? They've already have the upper hand, what else do they need to do!?"

"Wait sir...5 more objects detected all breaking through the Earth's atmosphere. 6 in total!"

"Where are they heading? Can we get a trajectory?"

"One second sir.....2 are heading for D.C., the other 3 are heading to Ontario, Paris and Tokyo...the location of the other MFs..."

"Just what the hell is going on here?!?"

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Famine glanced above as his radar began to beep as well.

“Hehe what is this? More troops for me to play with?” The boosters on Pale Horse suddenly ignited as he quickly began to ascend hoping to intercept with the oncoming object.

The drop pod made its way through the slowly moving clouds as the bolts keeping the pod closed suddenly began to fling off. The pod then split in two revealing the light blue and pink MF, Blue Angel. Heather smirked pushing his light brown strands of hair to side as to not get in the way. Pale Horse was continuing its ascent rather quickly in a straight path showing no signs of taking a different route.

“Heh, you’re making this way too easy...” Heather mumbled under her breath. Her sniper scope descended, she leaned her body forward as the rail cannon flipped over her MF’s shoulder gathering energy.

“What the hell?!” Famine’s eyes widened, it was too late; by the time he realized the rail cannon was charging it had already fired. He tried to avoid the blast, Pale Horse shifted to the right but the entire left side of the gray MF was eradicated in a single shot. The humming sound softly faded. Heather began to chuckle as Pale Horse suddenly stopped its movement, smoke smoldering off the left side of the torso.

His teeth began to grind against one another, he was infuriated and Heather just continued to laugh.

“So you’re one of the four horsemen huh? Not too intimidating if you ask me...”

“You....BITCH!”

Paris too was left in ruins; the streets were decimated as War treaded through the once gorgeous city. Black Horse left nothing untouched. War was satisfied with the massacre that he created. He indulged himself in the screams of suffering and torment that he heard throughout the city as people, women, men and even children were killed or severely injured praying for death to come; but unfortunately for them, it was War that was present.

“No more people...eh, how will I...ooooohhh, and what is this?” He mentioned as his radar detected the descent pod that was shooting towards his position.

“Looks like I found something to do....hehe...poor soul doesn’t know what he’s getting himself into.”

“Paris....it’s completely gone...that bastard...he’ll pay. I swear he’ll pay!” Zach screamed. His anxiety was growing; he couldn’t wait for the pod to open automatically anymore. His untainted anger was growing within his stomach; he could feel his berserker instincts slowly taking over his soul. And for once he didn’t mind.

Suddenly the descent pod exploded and Hades shot out in a fit of pure rage. Zach stared at Black Horse that was miles below him. His gray gradient eyes wouldn’t budge; they stayed perfectly still staring at the monster that was responsible for slaying innocent people.

“You....you....you KILLED ALL THESE PEOPLE!” He screamed. The sound of his voice pierced Black Horse suddenly burying it inside the deepest regions of his soul; War quickly looked above him in confusion. His eyes widened as a massive beam of crimson energy engulfed Black Horse followed by dozens more. With each hit tons of diluted smoke filtered into the sky.

Pestilence remained looking into the sky waiting for his next opponent to show up. His radar was beeping for at least a minute by now and he could hardly contain his excitement.

“Where the hell are you? I’ve been waiting far too long!” He screamed.

White Horse then was thrown to the side abruptly, as the sleek MF fell towards the ocean below it was quickly caught. Two long metallic coils wrapped around the leg units of the machine preventing it from crashing into the ocean.

Anima slowly descended, Mario smirked as he glared at White Horse below him.

“How you doing sunshine? Heehee..”

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“So you’re my opponent...good, I want a work out.” Pestilence replied.

“I’m happy I can oblige...” Mario replied.

A strong current of electricity flowed through both coils engulfing White Horse. The MF began to sizzle from the attack; Mario smiled and quickly began to spin in a circle while still remaining connected to White Horse. After about 4 rotations Anima’ released the coils and White Horse was flung uncontrollably towards Tokyo.

“This has got to be a joke...” Mario muttered.

Death yawned from the apparent boredom in Ontario. In his opinion the city wasn’t worth his time, they barely put up a worthy battle. His tank like MF, Reaper Horse continued to slug around the ruins and debris of the city. He was intrigued by the blinking dot that had been blinking on his radar screen for a few minutes; his weapons were already staring into the sky waiting for his opponent to fall.

“There you are...hahahaha!” Death screamed instantly pulling the trigger. The two massive plasma cannons flew backwards while sending a thick beam of energy into the sky.

“Couldn’t wait for me to get down there huh? Fine, I’ll play by your rules. It’s been too long since I’ve seen battle! I’ll show everyone that I’m one of the best!” Reine shouted. His eyes slowly transferred to a glossy crimson gradient, his sextuple energy cannon jerked over the shoulder and a single lock on box solidified around Reaper Horse. Reine’s thumb slightly pushed on the side crimson button firing all six cannons. Six cerulean beams rushed towards Reaper Horse slicing through the two beams Death fired. Death stared taking a deep breath as the six beams fully collided with his MF.

“I will make you pay for every death you caused!” Reine screamed.

Rebel endlessly tapped his fingers onto his forearms while they crossed over his chest. Shadow stood on the ground just in front of the Revelations building patiently waiting. His eye lids slowly opened as a smile gleamed on his face. He heard the radar blaring in the background but he didn’t care. It only meant that he was done waiting.

“Finally...” Rebel mumbled. Shadow’s boosters slowly lit up sending the MF into the air, that much closer to his next opponent.

Adam glanced over to Stephen who was still shown on the display screen.

“You ready?”

“Yeah...”

Both drop pods blew up revealing both Blue Dragon and Alpha.

Rebel smirked; he didn’t expect both of the brothers.

“Well isn’t this a treat. I get to deal with both of you...hehe..”

“I wouldn’t get too excited!” Adam screamed. Both Blue Dragon and Alpha zoomed towards Shadow with their dual energy sabers ignited. Rebel smirked igniting his energy saber. At the same instance all three MFs swung their sabers. A booming explosion lit up the sky causing the water to rush violently along the coast line as the three MF’s collided. As the blaring light slowly dissipated, Shadow appeared holding off both Blue Dragon and Alpha, the left arm energy saber clashing with Blue Dragon’s energy saber and its obsidian metallic right hand grabbing Alpha’s right wrist.

Nick’s eyes shot open, his vision somewhat blurred but he still managed to make out Blue Dragon and Alpha.

Adam....and Stephen....you can’t beat him alone....

“Adam....and Stephen....you can’t beat him alone...”

Final Chapter: Final Declaration

Rebel pulled the throttles to the side while hitting the accelerators. The crimson flames pushed out from the boosters as the darkened MF slammed forward into Blue Dragon causing the dual energy saber to fling out of the metallic hand. Shadow still gripping onto Alpha collided with the torso of Blue Dragon causing the blue MF to fall to the water below. Just as Blue Dragon descended Shadow spun around just as it released Alpha. While Adam continued to fall towards the raging waves Alpha flew towards D.C. Stephen cringed and quickly recovered, the thrusters and boosters slowly fluttering amongst the sky. Adam did the same as Blue Dragon eloquently flew on its back over the Atlantic, streams of steam and water burst upwards into the sky as the blue MF continued its path.

“Heh...this should indeed be fun...” Rebel mumbled.

Shadow soared heading towards Alpha since it was the closest, the plasma rifle recoiling after each devastating round launched. Alpha’s boosters moved to a 45 degree angle and launched violently. The crimson MF dashed to the right and then to the left, Stephen continued this motion as he avoided the plasma rounds while heading towards Shadow. As Shadow continued its path towards Alpha with the left arm arching backwards preparing to strike 8 cerulean energy beams pierced through the space between Stephen and Rebel; Adam smirked as Blue Dragon sped towards the battle above, the eight orbital wings now flying through the clouds surrounding Shadow. Rebel glanced to the side; he saw the wings and shrugged them off. He continued focusing on the red MF that was now before him. Alpha’s right arm slashed with the dual energy saber, the two crimson beams cut through the air but narrowly missed Shadow. With quick maneuvering Rebel swayed to the right and fired the plasma rifle. As the crimson beam narrowly closed the gap between Shadow and Alpha a blue surge of energy zoomed by deflecting the beam outwards. Blue Dragon then began to fire the dual energy rifles at a rapid pace; Shadow dodged every attack and quickly flew on its side descending towards the azure ocean.

“You’re not getting away!” Adam screamed, Blue Dragon’s wings extended outwards as the extra boosters lit up. Alpha quickly separated the energy sabers docking them on the side of the metallic thighs. Both the right and left hand crossed over the crimson torso grabbing onto the beam boomerangs resting on the shoulders. With a quick pull both weapons began to roar emanating a thin crimson beam of energy. Adam nodded silently as he took a quick glance at his brother. Alpha spun around throwing the two beam boomerangs into the air. As the two narrow weapons flung through the air Blue Dragon’s eight angular wings spread out abruptly quickly dislodging from the wing pack.

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Rebel smirked just as he forced Shadow to turn around. As the black and crimson MF shifted the first beam boomerang collided with the brightly burning energy saber. Once the beam connected Shadow's left arm forced the saber to push outwards knocking the beam boomerang in the opposite direction. He failed to see the second boomerang which appeared right in front of him, his eyes widened and reacted. Shadow's torso sway to the left while trying to arch backwards in an attempt to avoid the collision, it didn't work and the spinning beam of energy slashed through the upper layer of armor that covered the torso. Thousands of minuscule bits of armor shattered into the burning sky. Shadow over turned in a flipping motion from the velocity of the boomerang and the abrupt shift in movement. As Rebel descended the six orbital wings once again began to fly around Shadow in random patterns. He sighed as he found himself being bombarded with dozens of cerulean energy beams. Suddenly both Alpha and Blue Dragon quickly descending towards him with Stephen in front and Adam behind, in the midst of the movement Alpha slammed the two energy sabers creating his dual energy saber. Alpha's left arm now holding the massive weapon swung but Shadow was managed to nimbly avoid the attack. As Shadow swayed to the left Blue Dragon sped past and slashed across the obsidian torso with its own energy saber.

Rebel's body trembled for a few seconds in response to the furious attack.

"Hehehahahaha...very good...maybe its time to step this up a notch. I would hate for humanity's fate to rest on such a dull battle!" Rebel screamed.

Neo System...engaged.

Both Adam and Stephen's eyes widened at the sudden increase in speed that Shadow now presented. The devilish MF abruptly hovered in front of Blue Dragon and Alpha. Just as the two MF's prepared to strike Shadow unleashed a storm of plasma energy which fulminated onto Blue Dragon engulfing the blue MF in a massive amount of darkened smoke and struck Alpha with the crimson saber. Both Blue Dragon and Alpha rapidly shot to the ground crashing into the small patch of land that floated on the ocean.

"*cough* This is much harder than I expected... *cough*" Adam said while his head constantly jerked forward from the abrupt coughs that shot out of his lips.

"*cough*...yeah. This bastard is taking everything we've thrown at him and still he stands coming back for more... *cough*"

"Any suggestions? *cough*"

"Yeah...let's give him what he wants..." Stephen replied smirking.

"Agreed, we can't hold anything back. If we fail here then there's no telling what he'll do with the rest of humanity." Adam replied.

Angel System Engaged... The feminine computerized voices alerted both Adam and Stephen.

The ground below began to shake in the same manor as that of an earthquake. Rebel slowly smiled as he leaned back in his chair wrapping his arms across his chest in anticipation.

A bright cerulean explosion singed the ground below Blue Dragon and Alpha, their thrusters burst with powerful energy sending the two MF's into the sky. Blue Dragon opened fire first with the dual energy rifles, as the cerulean rounds of energy pierced the azure sky Alpha flung the two beam boomerangs once again. Rebel gently pushed the strands of hair that went astray from the rest, his hands grabbed onto the throttles. Shadow's left leg flung upwards deflecting the first boomerang and during a flip-like motion the right leg deflected the other. Shadow began to fly heading towards the two brothers adjusting his flight pattern when beams of energy approached. His crimson hued eyes stared at the remote detonator for the EAP satellite cannon that was looming above in the depths of space.

"Maybe you two do not understand the severity of the situation...allow me to demonstrate!" Rebel screamed. His left hand clutched onto the remote detonator and with no hesitation or second thought he pushed the button. Once the button was pushed it sent hundreds of signals to the weapon of destruction floating hidden beneath the shadows.

"WHAT?!" Adam screamed. Neither Adam nor Stephen knew what was going on, the EAP cannon was a mystery to everyone and as much as they hated being kept in the dark they had no other choice but to wait to see what happened.

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In space the elongated spherical weapon lit up emanating a distinct aura of golden energy while spheres of compacted plasma began to circulate around the main cannon. A slight soothing hum started to distribute through space as hundreds of pilots and civilians alike on Prosperity ran to the closest window to see what was happening. The EAP cannon was equipped with a Mirage Distributor, a generator that creates a stealth like appearance for the object equipped with it. Now that the cannon was activated it became coherently visible to every man, woman and child.

Chris Procella stood in one of the halls connecting Prosperity to the dome, his brown eyes frozen in fear from the massive weapon. Next to him was his own MF team, Michelle Dolce who was already concerned for Mario's well being was only beginning to worry even more.

"What the hell is that thing?" Michelle exclaimed. Her voice cracking every few words. Chris sighed and responded while staring at the spectacle that now lingered in space just above Earth's atmosphere.

"I don't know...but I know it can't be anything good..."

"It's a satellite cannon...it belongs to the EAP...or at least that's what I recall..." Leo Ombra stumbled out into the corridor joining the collective ensemble of confused and concerned people.

"A satellite cannon...this isn't good at all..." Chris mumbled.

The cannon began to flicker with golden lights, it was preparing to fire. Everyone gazed with their mouths gaped wide. The moment everyone feared struck and the cannon fired. A slow thick beam of intense radiating positron energy began its decent towards Earth. The golden beam pierced through the upper layers of crisp snow white clouds creating dozens of atmospheric rings surrounding the blast.

"Do you hear that?" Adam asked turning to Stephen.

"Yeah...what the hell did you do?!" Stephen screamed.

Rebel smirked. Shadow burst out of its stationary position and quickly struck Alpha towards the ground with a single swipe from the energy saber. Adam quickly snapped out of his trance and boosted towards Shadow, just as Blue Dragon approached from behind Rebel Shadow suddenly turned around kicking Blue Dragon away swiftly.

"Ahh!..." Adam yelled while his MF spiraled uncontrollably towards the raging torrent of water below. As his eyes stared into the sky above him they saw the normally azure sky change to a bright yellowish tint. The thunderous boom from the oncoming beam startled his soul; the clouds began to part as the front edge of the beam tore through the sky.

"Stephen!" Adam yelled.

"Yeah...I know. I see it!"

"It's too late for you...Stephen Novus." Rebel said. Shadow began to swing its left arm; the trajectory of the arm would cause the energy saber to pierce through the cockpit instantly killing the pilot. Just before the searing beam of energy came close to even touching the armor 6 crimson beams of energy pelted onto Shadow sending the MF out of the way. Rebel cringed with anger; his head jerked to the side and was shocked at what he saw.

I am not through with you yet!

"I am not through with you yet!" Nick roared as Chimera seemingly appeared out of nowhere.

"Heh...you're still around? Amusing." Rebel replied.

Both Stephen and Adam stared at the oncoming Chimera with wide eyes.

"How...how is this possible?..." Adam mumbled.

"Nick..." Stephen replied.

Rebel turned around in disgust from Adam and Stephen's lack of logic and rationality.

"Please...you two are aware of the clones being produced by Genesis. This Chimera, this Nick is nothing more than a carbon copy of your dead brother!" Rebel screamed.

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How many times must I tell you...I don't care about having an identity!

"How many times must I tell you...I don't care about having an identity!" Nick screamed. Chimera soared past Alpha heading straight for Shadow. The energy lance extended outwards ignited, the crimson energy flames fluttered in the air and slashed across the thick gash that outlined Shadow's core from both Adam and Stephen's own attacks.

"Hey...umm guys...about that blast!" Adam screamed.

"Hehehe.... This is what is riding on your victory....hahahaha!" Rebel screamed, he then kicked Chimera knocking the demonic MF back towards Alpha.

Everyone watched as the massive beam of energy crashed into the ocean causing a tremendous uproar of energy and water to fly into the air. A destructive shockwave radiated out from the point of impact, as the shockwave passed over the ocean violent tempest of water swept outwards. Seaports or other town near the Atlantic were engulfed in tremendous waves causing destruction and chaos to blanket their communities. Blue Dragon, Alpha, Chimera and even Shadow were flung relentlessly through the wild hard hitting wind patterns. As the visible energy slowly dissipated a thick mushroom cloud towered over the point of impact, the booming thunder started to subside only to be replaced with the sinister laughter emanating from Rebel. Shadow lingered over the three other MFs, the energy saber fully ignited and the plasma rifle pointing down.

Blue Dragon floated over the water in between Chimera and Alpha. Their boosters constantly sustaining their mid air floating.

"So you're the clone of our brother....they successfully created you..." Adam mumbled looking over to Chimera.

Nick smirked glancing over to Adam

That is how I came into existence...I don't think it matters right now..

"That is how I came into existence...I don't think it matter right now.."

"Nick's right...errr, the clone is right...right now all that matters is defeating Rebel before he fires that cannon again. With a power like that he can easily purge all of humanity!" Stephen screamed.

"Right..." Adam replied.

Blue Dragon, Chimera and Alpha ignited their respective weapons all staring back at Shadow, the supposedly superior MF.

"Hehehe...what is this? A poor attempt at a family reunion...hehe...hahaha. Rest assured that even with the Chimera you three still can not compare to me...I AM HUMANITY'S JUDGE!" Rebel screamed.

Shadow burst heading towards the three MFs, the frame spun around firing the plasma rifle. The three MF's quickly separated allowing the beams to freely pass by and crash into the water below. Rebel's eye shifted to the right just as Blue Dragon fired the thigh cannons. The two cerulean beams blew up on the right side of Shadow. The abrupt explosion caused Shadow to flip sideways, just then Alpha tackled Shadow and while embracing the obsidian MF fired the two cannons resting on its broad shoulders. The green beams of energy exploded on the upper part of the core. Smoke floated surrounding Shadow blocking the camera that was in the head unit. Rebel pounded his console; static covered every display screen in the cockpit. Next Alpha side stepped out of the way as Chimera struck with the energy lance. The long thin weapon tore up the torso creating another gash. Just after the attack all three MFs boosted next to each other and suddenly burst in a fit of speed towards Shadow. The smoke managed to clear and Rebel was able to see clearly, but didn't like what he saw. Blue Dragon, Alpha and Chimera flying in a triangular formation, at the last second Alpha departed while throwing the beam boomerangs. Rebel cringed, his anger was at its fullest, and he no longer had any tolerance left to deal with the three

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would be brothers. The left equipped energy saber pierced the two boomerangs causing them to burst in flames. The remains of the weapons slowly floated towards the ocean covered in ash.

“They were getting annoying!” Rebel screamed.

The eight azure wings once again fully extended and launched while Chimera’s six angular wings began to fire. Rebel’s eyes followed the movements of the recently launched orbital wings but failed to notice the dozen of crimson beams that were on their way. Shadow danced roughly as each crimson beam impacted onto the obsidian armor. On top of that the orbital wings began to unleash an onslaught of energy as well. Rebel’s breath began to become sporadic, his eyes thinned staring at Blue Dragon, and then at Alpha and finally at Chimera.

Streams of nearly translucent smoke burned off the enflamed armor of Shadow as the three brothers were becoming a bigger threat than Rebel could ever dream of them being.

“That... THAT’S ENOUGH!” Rebel screamed.

Shadow then vanished from sight and reappeared behind Chimera.

“Soulless creatures should be the first to be expunged..” Rebel mumbled. The energy saber lunged into the back of Chimera piercing through the dull crimson armor. The intensity of the radiating beam overran the cockpit. The heat continued to increase inside the cockpit, sweat rolled out of every pore on Nick’s body, as the sweat would excrete they would slowly evaporate from the heat. Nick smiled as the energy from the saber managed to engulf the cockpit and his body. The carbon copy of Nick quickly enflamed and exploded only for the insides to be incinerated. Shadow withdrew its energy saber as minor explosions erupted out from Chimera’s frame.

“NO!” Adam screamed. The orbital wings reattached and Blue Dragon took off.

“Be patient...I’ll deal with you soon enough.” Rebel replied.

Blue Dragon’s right arm swung the dual energy saber but pierced only the image of Shadow left floating. Shadow was so fast that an after image of the frame remained in its position prior to the launch.

“Stephen look out!” Adam screamed.

Stephen’s head slowly turned as Shadow reappeared behind Alpha. Rebel attempted the same maneuver but Alpha managed to move out of the way in time. Rebel cringed as Alpha now remained behind Shadow.

“You bastard...” Stephen mumbled. The dual energy saber slashed through the right arm of Shadow causing the joints to explode in flames. Following the explosion Shadow vanished once again but this time gave Stephen no time to counter. Shadow flew at an angle slicing through Alpha’s right arm and then through both leg units. A tremendous explosion engulfed Alpha. Bubbling clouds of smoke lingered in the area where Alpha once was. Adam stared at the burning cluster of clouds angrily. His fists began to shake trying to contain the anger that flowed through Adam’s body.

To Rebel’s surprise two beams of green energy escaped from the cloud of smoke and penetrated the left leg unit of Shadow. The leg failed to explode but now two thin holes rested in the left leg.

“Still alive huh...fine!” Rebel screamed.

Adam pulled back on the throttles.

Angel System...EX Mode engaged. He was scared to use it, he wasn’t sure for how long he could sustain the strain. But now he knew he had little choice any more. The gravitational forces increased pulling and tugging at his body. His eyes quivered and his arms shook, but he ignored it.

Blue Dragon like Shadow suddenly vanished from sight. The cluster of smoke cleared revealing a heavily damaged Alpha, the head unit was singed and the right side of the crimson MF was gone, nothing more than sparks of electricity and flinging wires. Stephen’s head slammed ferociously against the control panel during the explosion, thin trickles of blood trailed down his face, staining his skin and even his hair.

“Heh...heh... you’re exhausted too..*cough*..” Stephen’s right palm covered his mouth. A small pond of blood floated on his palm, he chuckled as Shadow now appeared before him.

“Die already!” Rebel screamed.

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Shadow sliced through the upper half of the torso but missed the cockpit because Stephen at the last second ignited the boosters. The remains of Alpha flung into the core of Shadow knocking it backwards before the crimson MF became useless and fell to the ground.

“REBEL!” Adam screamed. Blue Dragon quickly sliced through the left side of Shadow creating a rigid metallic gash.

“You! I’ll kill you here and now!” Rebel screamed.

Both Shadow and Blue Dragon struck, their energy sabers colliding. The two MFs began to boost higher into the sky while still struggling, just like how they met in the end last few minutes of the tournament finals. Both pilots were extremely exhausted and on their last breaths.

“I won’t let you destroy humanity! Your twisted dreams, your tainted perception on life! They will not come to pass!” Adam screamed.

Blue Dragon’s arm slowly began to move forward pushing Shadow’s left arm inwards. The joints creaked from the abrupt movement.

“Hahaha...you have no clue what you’re talking about Adam. Humanity is full of sinners, sinners who have no right to inhabit the Earth. This paradise that God has created!”

“Who the hell are you to decide that? You’re not God! You’re human!”

“Human?...hahaha! I am not human! I am more than human, I am transcending to a God! I alone understand everything humanity has done, their sins, their hopes, their admirations, their greed!” Rebel screamed. His foot slightly tapped the accelerator as the back boosters ignited. The left arm pushed forward now leaning forward as Blue Dragon began to be forced back.

“You don’t understand anything! You’re deluded...just WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?!”

“Who am I?...Hehehehahaha!!! Who am I? WHO AM I? I AM LUSCIOUS MALUM!”

Adam’s focused confident eyes departed from that and widened in shock. A sharp chill flew down his spine. Rebel had just declared himself as Luscious, Adam knew that was impossible because Luscious was still on Prosperity. The lack in response caused Blue Dragon to weaken and Shadow to strengthen. The black MF lunged forward slicing off Blue Dragon’s left arm. The explosion caused the blue MF to fall to the side. Flames spurt out from the massive wound as wires flung.

“YOU CAN’T STOP IT...NOT NOW! THIS IS THE END OF HUMANITY!” Rebel screamed. He once again pushed the remote detonator for the satellite cannon.

“Huh...NO!” Adam screamed but it was too late. The satellite cannon was already gathering the energy needed to fire. Blue Dragon burst towards Shadow relentlessly swing the energy saber. The eight wings already launched and began to fire upon Shadow. Rebel chuckled as he swatted each wing down like bugs.

“You can’t stop this Adam...this is humanity’s destiny! My future...MY DESTINY!”

“YOU’RE WRONG!” Adam screamed as he soared towards Shadow.

“HUH....what?!” Rebel screamed as Blue Dragon’s energy saber punctured the obsidian torso. The searing beam of radiating cerulean energy engulfed the cockpit continuing to burn as Rebel smirked. Blue Dragon’s two thigh cannons pivoted upwards and fired. The two cerulean beams of energy exploded on the torso. Sparks continued to fly rampant in the cockpit as Rebel’s body slowly deteriorated.

“Heh...*cough*...I can’t...*cough*...fail...*cough* impossible...*cough*” Blood violently burst out of his mouth. His crimson eyes slowly closed as his body was engulfed in a massive explosion that caused Shadow to be ripped apart. Adam took deep breaths as he tried to calm down while watching the MF known as Shadow erupted in flames.

Suddenly an image of Chris Procella lit up on Blue Dragon’s display screen.

“Huh...”

“This is Lieutenant Chris Procella...we have successfully disabled the satellite cannon...that danger has been averted.”

“...good to know...wait we?” Adam questioned.

His communications screen shifted to an image that was fed to Tempest’s camera. Every MF pilot that participated in the Azure Cup floated around the destroyed cannon.

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“You mean...everyone of them....” Adam mumbled.

“Yeah...we weren't going to sit idly by while the Earth was going to be destroyed..” Chris replied.

“Heh...thanks...” Adam replied.

“Wait...what happened to Rebel?”

Adam sighed. “He's at peace now....”

Vincent Avidus stared at the destruction that was before him.

“And how are we going to explain this?”

“It doesn't matter....it's not your problem...” Severen's voice boomed.

Vincent turned around to see a 9 millimeter pistol glaring at his face.

“You...haha, the Genesis poster boy is going to kill me?”

“Yeah...” Severen replied as he pulled the trigger.

Follow the boom Vincent fell to the ground, his eyes watching the trail of crimson blood that flowed out of his body flinging into the air. All of the military personnel had already evacuated the building leaving Vincent alone. Severen walked over to the twitching body of Vincent Avidus. His teeth glistening along with the devilish grin that covered his face, cheek to cheek.

“You had your chance Vincent and you failed...I guess it's to be expected, relying on nuclear weapons to force humanity into a nuclear winter thus slowly and tragically ending humanity. Heh, children's games, we and we alone know what it takes to make this tribulation happen, not you or that failure...hehe...don't celebrate prematurely....the worst has yet to come..” Sereven smiled one last time as he threw the gun onto the corpse of Vincent Avidus.

Blue Dragon landed next to Alpha, both frames had taken on a severe amount of damage, possibly beyond repair. The azure cockpit opened as Adam clutched onto the thin cable that began to descend him to the ground. Thousands of innocent civilians all started to crowd around the two MFs. Stephen smirked; he was quietly perched on the torso of Alpha.

“You did it...**cough**...pity you couldn't do that during the tournament. Hehe...” Stephen chuckled.

“Yeah...oh well...**cough**...not that it matters anyway, we stopped him.”

“Yeah...we stopped him but what about ever other person like him. And then there's Genesis, we still don't know what they're up to..”

“We'll deal with them when the time comes...Right now we need to rebuild. I heard from everyone else, the 4 MFs that followed Luscious were destroyed. Heather, Mario, Zach and Reine are heading over here....”

“Indeed, we will need to rebuild. Make this a much stronger world and try to correct the mistakes that haunt our past.” Stephen replied.

“Yeah....that is our future...our destiny....” Adam replied. His hair flapping wildly through the harsh frigid breeze.

Epilogue

It's been 2 months since Rebel's attempted tribulation was ended. Some how we managed to stop him. Maybe it was because of the clone of my brother, Nick that showed up miraculously, no, I know that's how we did it. If it wasn't for him then Shadow wouldn't have been weakened for me to take prevail. Vincent Avidus mysteriously disappeared after the incident; however Revelations still had governing control over the Trinity Alliance so a new leader was needed. Oddly enough Luscious Malum some how managed to secure the job. Because of his transition to politics Severen Prodito has taken the thrown to the Genesis Empire. I'm not too sure why and how Luscious was elected, or even nominated for that matter, but it makes no difference. I have left the Trinity Alliance, even though I wanted to help my brother, Stephen make it to the top in order to change how things were handled, I could no longer deal with the maliciousness that the military would display, not after Berlin. Right now things are pretty quiet, Berlin is currently being rebuilt and Luscious is sending money to support. Which raises suspicion, but that is no longer my concern. I have taken Sharon up on her offer; I am currently just enjoying life. She moved into my apartment because she has no where to go. There is rumor of another Azure Cup tournament taking place next year, if there is any truth to this then I plan on participating; I'll win it too.

"Adam...come on we're going to be late!" I hear Sharon yelling for me. I smile and look back at her.

"Sorry..."

"Sorry isn't going to cut it if we miss our flight!"

"I don't see the big deal; we can go to Mars any time..."

"That's true, but the construction for colonies on Mars is going to be starting soon. We need to secure a deposit so we can have an apartment when things are ready!" She was right; we did need to get to Mars as fast as possible. Ever since Luscious took control of the TA, he has been trying effortlessly to colonize Mars and focus on promoting peace between the TA and the EAP. We'll see what happens.